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Title: From Israel to Epworth: An assessment of the Psalms in the life of Methodist
worship

Date: July 2003

Originally published as: University of Liverpool MTh dissertation

Example citation: Houghton, G. M. (2011). *From Israel to Epworth: An assessment
of the Psalms in the life of Methodist worship*. (Unpublished master's thesis).
University of Liverpool, United Kingdom.

Version of item: Submitted version

Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10034/110435>

From Israel to Epworth

An assessment of the Psalms in the life of Methodist worship

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Dissertation submitted for the Degree of Master of Theology (Applied
Theology) in the University of Liverpool in part fulfilment of the
Modular Programme in Applied Theology

July 2003

Abstract

This dissertation looks at contemporary use of the Psalms in Methodist public worship, showing how Methodism is abandoning the tradition of using the Psalms and losing touch with both Christian tradition and the wishes of its founding father, John Wesley. The literature review considers the history of the Psalms in worship and then looks at their contemporary importance for worship. This includes an assessment of the universality both of the emotions expressed in the Psalms and of the language used. The importance of the Psalms to early Methodism is also considered. By means of two questionnaires issued to preachers and worshippers in the Lytham St Annes' Circuit of the Methodist Church, the dissertation goes on to show the limited use made of the Psalms in Methodist worship and the detrimental effect of this limited use. Finally the dissertation outlines some means by which the Psalms might be reincorporated into Methodist worship and offers reasons, drawn from the literature review, about why this is so important for the spiritual well-being of individual worshippers.

Declaration

The work is original and has not been submitted previously in support of any qualification or course.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to Tom Houghton for his patience and support, to Eric Christianson of Chester College for his encouraging supervision, to the staff of The Northern Ordination Course for their faith in my abilities and for obtaining funding for me, and to Walter Brueggemann of Columbia Theological Seminary without whom this work would never have been conceived, let alone brought to completion.

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From Israel to Epworth

An assessment of the Psalms in the life of Methodist worship

Introduction

This dissertation investigates the use of the Psalms within contemporary Methodist worship. Ecumenical ordination training (The Northern Ordination Course) and practical experience of worship in a variety of Christian traditions made me realise that Methodism was somewhat out of step with its Christian colleagues. This dissertation looks at the reality of Methodist Psalm use within one circuit of the Methodist Connexion in England and contrasts that use both with traditional Christian use of the Psalms and with contemporary discussions regarding the value of the Psalms for Christian discipleship.

The study considers the role of the Psalms in worship throughout their three-thousand year history and shows how they have been the life-blood of Christian worship throughout the history of the Church. The literature review reveals not only the importance of the Psalms in Christian worship in the past, but also the relevance and importance of the Psalms for contemporary Christian worship, as they continue to enable worshippers to speak to God about every possible life experience and to utter to God every possible emotion, both positive and negative. The literature review further shows the importance John Wesley, the founding father of Methodism, attached to the Psalms and how, despite

his reservations about some parts of some Psalms, he always expected a psalm to be included in Methodist worship.

Extensive reading on the subject of the Psalms, covering their history, their form, their use in worship over the ages, their contemporary use in worship in other traditions and their value as a pastoral aid, make it clear that the Psalms have an important role in enriching worship and in assisting with the pastoral care of worshippers. A whole range of emotions and experiences expressed in the Psalms still resonate with contemporary worshippers, yet it seems that Methodists are being denied this heritage, are being disadvantaged in their walk with God. One objective of this thesis is to demonstrate why the inclusion of the Psalms is important for contemporary Christian worship.

With the aid of two questionnaires, distributed to preachers and congregations, the research was designed to verify the proposition that the Psalms are used rarely within contemporary Methodist worship and that they are use in a restricted number of settings. As will become clear, the results of the questionnaires indicate that psalms are no longer a regular feature of Methodist worship, despite their inclusion both in the Methodist hymnbook, *Hymns and Psalms* (Methodist Publishing House 1983) and in the lectionary to be found in the *Methodist Worship Book* (Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes 1999 p566-600). At the same time the congregational questionnaire also brings to light the fact that

individual worshippers have a clear understanding of the value of the Psalms for their spiritual well-being, offering further evidence as to why the Psalms are important for worship.

The literature review and the congregational questionnaire also contribute to the third objective of suggesting why the use of Psalms should be increased and improved within Methodist worship. They reveal that the omission of Psalms from worship is an impoverishment of worship and of the spiritual life of the individual worshipper. In addition the preachers' questionnaire reveals that there is a desire on their part to improve their use of the Psalms in worship. This is necessary if a growing lack of knowledge of the Psalms amongst both congregations and preachers is to be avoided. Only if the preachers receive improved training with regard to the use of the Psalms in worship can there be any hope of preventing the total loss of the Psalms from Methodist worship.

With regard to the improved training of preachers, this research is of importance to those who devise training programmes for worship leaders. A final objective of this research is, therefore, to suggest ways, with reference to the literature review and the results of the two questionnaires, in which the use of the Psalms might be increased in Methodist worship. It is appropriate to suggest some means by which preachers could be encouraged to give the Psalms greater attention as

they lead worship, since the literature review which follows gives copious evidence of the importance of the Psalms in Christian worship.

Literature Review

'For two millennia this collection of 150 individual psalms has helped to shape the public and private worship of Jews and Christians.'
(Holladay 1993 p1)

In the course of this literature review I propose to show both how the Psalms have been a constant feature of both Jewish and Christian worship and why, despite their Jewish origins, they have formed such an important part of worship for Christianity. Their value to the worshipping community reflects their very diverse nature. The Psalms offer us a huge range of emotions, lead us through a great variety of experiences, speak to us with a poetic language that crosses cultural and historical boundaries, and, unlike any other scripture, allow us to speak directly to God whatever our situation. The Psalms thus have a universality which cannot be denied and which explains their continued use by God's people.

I propose to trace a line of continuity from the earliest use of the Psalms in Israelite worship through New Testament Christianity and the Reformation to their present use both in the Methodist tradition and in other Christian traditions. This will show the enduring importance of the Psalms to Christian worship and highlight the contrast between current Methodist practice and the practice of other contemporary Christian traditions and of Christian communities, including Methodists, in the past.

I shall also look at contemporary thinking on the importance of expressing emotions in order to ensure the well-being of the individual and the need to give people permission to express these emotions, even when they may be very negative, in order to foster a healthy relationship with God, self and neighbour. Clearly this has implications for the use of the Psalms in worship and I shall touch briefly on this topic. Finally I shall look at contemporary attempts to revitalise old ways, or find new ways, of using the Psalms in worship, with a view to showing how this is merely an extension of the many re-workings the Psalms have undergone in their history. This will also reveal that there are possibilities for revitalising the use made by Methodists of this valuable resource.

Israelite use of the Psalms

Academic study of the Psalms over the past hundred years has highlighted several different approaches to understanding both their content and their use in Israelite worship. These different approaches, have ranged from study of their cultic setting, which asks questions about the use of the Psalms in Israelite worship, through literary criticism, which relates to the tension between the apparent spontaneity of the emotions expressed and the careful composition of these poetic prayers, through form criticism and the development of genre as a way of classifying the Psalms, with a view to showing their capacity to address

every life situation, to a more global approach which endeavours to combine these approaches. Despite this variety of approach, most students of the Psalms seem unanimous in their understanding that the Psalms express deep emotions, and experiences of great joy and overwhelming sadness, delightful praise and bitter anger, unshakeable confidence in God and a deep sense of the absence of God.

Study of the categories of the Psalms was initiated by Hermann Gunkel who developed a range of categories, including hymns, laments, individual and corporate, and individual songs of thanksgiving, and a range of sub-categories including ‘Torah’ and songs of thanksgiving of Israel. He then went on to look more closely at the *Sitz im Leben* of the Psalms, endeavouring to place them in a cultic setting in the worshipping Israelite community. This two-fold approach to the Psalms, classification by type and the attempt to determine their *Sitz im Leben* paved the way for further research along these two different lines. It must be understood, however, that Gunkel’s research centred on understanding the Psalms as they were used for worship within the Israelite community.

His work on the *Sitz im Leben* of the Psalms was continued by Sigmund Mowinckel who argues that the only way to understand the ‘emotion in the psalmist’s heart’ is to find ‘the actual situation in which he is placed’ (Mowinckel 1967 p24) and concludes that while all the psalm types have their setting, that setting is cultic (op. cit. p28),

specifically relating to an annual enthronement festival in which Yahweh and the king (Yahweh's regent on earth) are re-affirmed as leaders of Israel. The Psalms for Mowinckel are thus a vehicle for corporate worship of God in which apparently individual Psalms are representative in nature, the 'I' of the individual Psalms including all the assembled worshippers. For him there is no doubt of the importance of worship for the Psalms and he suggests that the 'I' psalms, far from being an indication of private worship, reflect the idea that 'a *representative* person in the cult [is] speaking on behalf of the congregation' (op. cit. p62). He further emphasises this idea of cultic use arguing that even those psalms which relate to entirely personal distress, like illness, cannot be 'non-cultic' 'as long as the private individual had to bring his offering to the Temple in order to be cleansed from his illness.' (Mowinckel 1962 p19). He goes on to argue that since thank-offerings were also made in the Temple, there can be no 'non-cultic' psalms of thanksgiving (*ibid.*).

Despite his enthusiasm for this enthronement festival as the *Sitz im Leben* of the Psalms, Mowinckel does not deny the emotional content of the Psalms, arguing that 'in the psalms the human heart has found its own counterpart at all times, in sorrow and in happiness' (1967 p1) and suggests that the purpose of such emotion is to 'touch the heart of Yahweh' (Mowinckel 1967 p195) in order that justice may be restored to Israel, but 'touching the heart of Yahweh' also implies both an intimate

relationship with God to which all Christians aspire and dialogue between God and his people which worship, and the use of the Psalms in particular, is surely intended to enable.

Mowinckel is followed in his festival hypothesis by Artur Weiser who claims not so much an enthronement festival as an annual covenant festival, which rehearses the salvific deeds or *Heilsgeschichte* of Yahweh, as the *Sitz im Leben* of the Psalms. Weiser accepts the many and varied types of Psalms, e.g. lament, praise, plea, and connects all of them, even the individual laments, to the cult of the covenant and the ‘revelation of Yahweh as its centre’ (Weiser 1962 p52). The covenant is to be remembered, rehearsed and celebrated regularly so that Yahweh’s salvific deeds are not forgotten, in much the same way that Christians celebrate the Eucharist as an act of remembrance. In this context the Psalms function as a reminder of God’s promises, allow worshippers to express not only praise and thanksgiving, but also a temporary lack of confidence in those promises and even anger that those promises have apparently not been kept. Such emotions and experiences are common to all God’s people so that the Psalms continue to enable people to relate honestly to God. Thus, as Weiser claims, ‘the Psalter has never ceased to enrich and stimulate the religious life of the Church and the individual believer’ (1962 p101), they have a life beyond their cultic setting in ancient Israel. Craig Broyles supports this thesis with his comment that the complaint

Psalms are intended to '[summon] God to conform to his promises' (1989 p221) which again also implies a dialogic nature to the Psalms.

The cultic settings for the Psalms favoured by Mowinckel and Weiser have received less support in recent years, partly because such theories can only ever be conjectural. We are not in a position to be certain about any cultic use of the Psalms in Israelite worship. In addition, the cultic settings have also been rejected as being too narrow to encompass all the Psalms. Consequently scholars have moved towards a form-critical approach to interpreting and understanding the Psalms.

The Life of the Psalms beyond Israel

Claus Westermann chose to develop Gunkel's different categories of the Psalms much more closely and developed five major categories involving lament or petition of the individual or the people, descriptive praise, and declarative praise of the individual or of the people. He inclines to the view that the individual psalms developed out of personal and family life and were, therefore, personal, while the communal psalms developed as Israel became a nation and the royal psalms developed as a consequence of the institution of the monarchy (Westermann 1989 p5). He also suggests that, in the light of the lack of literacy at that time, these individual psalms must have been sufficiently general in their scope to find resonance with other members of the community so that in time they

were incorporated into the Psalter. This thus supports the notion that the Psalms are sufficiently general in their composition and content to have universal appeal.

His underlying thesis is that they represent ‘two basic modes of speaking to God: praise and petition’ (Westermann 1981 p35) so that despite his various categories, he is able to say that ‘in the last analysis, [what] takes place in the Psalms is prayer’ (op. cit. p24). The categories themselves, however, illumine an aspect of the universal appeal of the Psalms, for praise, lament, thanksgiving, plea are all aspects of the believer’s relationship with God, and the availability of this huge range of categories ensures that there is a Psalm to fit most situations.

Furthermore, the appeal to God in plea or lament is given validity, is indeed permitted, by the very fact that such categories exist and are accepted within the biblical canon. As Craig Broyles suggests, ‘Genre thus serves as a shared pattern of communication by which speakers can make themselves understood to listeners’ (1989 p25). The use of a particular psalm category speaks not only to God but also to the other worshippers, enabling the whole community to participate in the emotion expressed. The Psalms thus have a communal function, enabling the psalmist to move from the loneliness of lament to the comfort of grief and pain shared with the community. The Psalms insist that not to speak out is to suffer further distress (Ps 39:2) which anticipates Eugene Peterson

who says that, 'When suffering cannot be expressed emotionally, there is a consequent inability to recover' (1980 p143) and Ulrike Bail who suggests that, 'The psalms of lament allow individuals to articulate experiences of violence, experiences which destroy social, psychological and physical integrity. The wall of silence which keeps the victim and isolated prisoner is broken down by such a naming of violence' (1998 p242).

These two approaches to Psalms study, namely cultic setting and category, have been adopted and adapted by Walter Brueggemann as he argues for a reading of the Psalms which not only helps our understanding of their setting in Israelite worship but also offers a way of understanding their contemporary relevance to Christian worship. Brueggemann argues that the Psalms can be fitted into three much broader categories which reflect the relationship between the psalmist and the world as he experiences it. The psalms are a conversation with God about the state of the world as the psalmist sees it and in an honest relationship with God the psalmist tells it 'as it is' and with no false piety or optimism. Brueggemann's first category is 'orientation' which encompasses all the Psalms which involve solely the praise of God, whether for his creative deeds or his salvific acts. These psalms of orientation are sung by anyone who finds that the world is good and consequently wishes to praise God for the goodness of God's world.

Brueggemann's second category, 'disorientation' includes all the Psalms which rail at God or which accuse God of failing to keep God's part of the covenantal relationship. The world does not match the image of the world that the covenantal relationship implies and the psalmist expresses this dissonance between belief and reality. The psalmist has no difficulty in ascribing the problem to God rather than himself, if he feels that he has remained righteous and kept his part of the covenant. Rather, he reminds God of the covenantal relationship in order to urge God to keep his side of the bargain, an understanding which chimes with Mowinckel's 'touching the heart of Yahweh' (1967 p195). Such disorientation, such dissonance between faith and reality, between this world and the kingdom of God, is familiar not only to early Israelites but also to contemporary worshippers and thus the Psalms of disorientation speak to Christians today as much as they spoke to their original composers. As Ingvar Fløysvik suggests, the complaint Psalms, which would fit into Brueggemann's category of 'disorientation', 'simply affirm that there are times when God is experienced as an enemy' (1997 p153) and while that may be a very difficult admission for any Christian to make, there is the possibility of making such an admission using the Psalms. Indeed, Brueggemann would argue that the Church's persistent use of the Psalms of orientation impoverishes worship and forces

worshippers into cognitive dissonance by refusing to acknowledge the hard reality of life that things may and do go wrong.

Brueggemann's final category is that of 're-orientation', Psalms in which the psalmist recognises that past difficulties have been overcome thanks to God's steadfast love and that 'all is right with the world' once again, or at least until the next period of disorientation. Again, this feeling of well-being after difficulty is not the preserve of the ancient Israelites but is one which present-day Christians also experience. Thus, Brueggemann's classification places the Psalms both in the Israelite world of their genesis and in the contemporary world of Christian faith and allows us to see how such a classification renders the Psalms relevant to any age and culture. This classification also allows us to look more closely at the way in which many commentators have seen universal emotions expressed in the Psalms.

The language of the Psalms

While the forms of the Psalms reveal a universality of appeal, covering, as they do, a wide range of human experience, the language of the Psalms also shows a universality which renders them accessible to people of every age and culture. Indeed Ingvar Fløysvik argues that 'because they [the Psalms] were intended for use in worship, they exhibit a generalized language that is applicable to different situations' (1997

p15). However spontaneous they appear, the Psalms are carefully written and composed to allow them to be readily understood by anybody who hears them, and because of the low level of literacy at the time of their composition, hearing would have been the principle way of receiving the Psalms. Consequently the language is frequently repetitive, so that hearers get a second opportunity to remember what has been said, and exploit the structures associated with each category of Psalm, again enabling the hearer to recognise more quickly the situation being described.

Patrick Miller supports this notion of universal language, suggesting that ‘the open language of the Psalms invites, allows and calls for interpretation’ (1986 p51). He considers that such open language makes it possible not only for interpretation that looks backward at how the Psalms were used, but also allows interpretation into the present and the future. It is this potential for interpreting the Psalms in the present and future which is so attractive to the contemporary reader of the Psalms and which explains their continued appeal.

Surprisingly, perhaps, given his strong interest in and emphasis on the enthronement festival as the *Sitz im Leben* of the Psalms, Sigmund Mowinckel also acknowledges the general language of the Psalms, attributing it to the fact that the Psalms are ‘for general use in the cult’ (1962 p14). Since the Psalms are ‘not too closely bound up with the

circumstances of the age' (1962 p14) they are open to Christians to use, and have been used in this way since the beginnings of Christianity.

Erhard Gerstenberger takes this argument a step further when he suggests that the combination of cultic use and illiteracy mean that the Psalms were used for public worship and therefore had to have a more general appeal than if they had been intended purely for private use. This makes the Psalms 'an inexhaustible source of inspiration and spiritual strength in Jewish and Christian worship' (1988 p35).

A further argument for the universal appeal of the Psalms is offered by James Mays when he suggests that the Psalms are fundamentally a statement that 'The LORD reigns' (1994 p30). Such a phrase can readily be accepted by both Jew and Christian and this explains the Psalms' adoption by Christians. Christians accept God's rule in their lives, acknowledging a new order established as a result of Christ's salvific death and resurrection. The fact that 'the LORD reigns' is celebrated at every Eucharist.

The Psalms in the early Church

It is not surprising therefore that the Psalms were used consistently by the early church and are quoted throughout the New Testament writings. Numerous Psalms are cited not only in the context of the Gospel story but also within the context of worship in the early church

(Old 1985 p27). It is striking that in the agony of the cross, Christ is recorded as using the Psalms to express his sense of dereliction. He, too, refuses to be silent. Furthermore, the structure and content of the three songs in Luke's Gospel (Magnificat, Benedictus and Nunc Dimittis) indicate a strong influence from the Psalms. Such use suggests not a break with Jewish tradition but a clear understanding of the value of the Psalms in enabling worshippers to express themselves to God. There is also evidence that the Psalms were used for prayer and praise by the early church and it has been suggested that the Psalms 'were the model for writing other hymns and prayers' (Mays 1994 p5).

The use of the Psalms in liturgy is documented from the end of the second century (Holladay 1993 p167) and remains constant through to the present day. Gradually, specific Psalms began to be associated with specific festivals of the Christian year (*ibid.*), for example Psalm 24 with Ascension Day, and although they were generally sung responsorially by the fourth century (*ibid.*) there is evidence that Christians were beginning to memorise them, so strong was their influence on Christian life. (*op. cit.* p165). Psalms were used either between the Old Testament lesson and the Epistle or as a prelude to the Gospel reading, resulting in the contemporary use of Psalms prior to the Gospel, and were also used during the distribution of the elements (*op. cit.* p175). Clearly the Psalms played an integral part in the liturgy, something which appears to

have been forgotten in Methodism, despite their inclusion in the lectionary to be found in the *Methodist Worship Book* (Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes 1999 p566-600).

The Reformation

The next major development in the use of Psalms in worship came with the Reformation and the introduction into some of the Reformed traditions of metrical Psalms in the vernacular, since hymns had been rejected (Day 1990 p140-141). Both Calvin and Luther translated the Psalms into their mother tongue, Calvin calling the Psalms ‘an anatomy of all parts of the soul’ (cited in Miller 1986 p19) and Luther claiming that ‘everyone, in whatever situation he may be, finds in that situation psalms and words that fit his case’ (cited in Miller 1986 p19-20). They wrote the Psalms in metrical form in order that they could be sung to contemporary well-known tunes (Morgan 2002) and would thus be accessible to the lay people. Singing is a good way of memorising so that singing the Psalms enables the singer to call them to mind on other occasions. Clearly the Psalms were seen as extremely important to the life of the worshipper. In the English language, several translations of the Psalter were produced, mostly in metrical form, for example Coverdale, and Sternhold. A metrical Psalter was even attributed to King James in an unsuccessful effort to persuade the Scots to adopt the

English prayer book and Psalter. Although some of this work may be attributed to political reasons, there was still a strong sense of needing the Psalms as prayers and hymns for the people to sing, enabling them to participate much more actively in worship. There was a new understanding that worship was not a spectator sport in which the congregation watched the priest at work, an understanding which is receiving renewed consideration in our own day as people realise that merely listening to a preacher does not necessarily engage the hearer in worship of God.

The consequence of the metrification of psalms were to be far-reaching. In due course it enabled Isaac Watts to write hymns based on the psalms (Joy to the World based on Ps 98, Give to our God immortal praise-Ps 136, God is the refuge of his saints-Ps 46 and many others), while adding a distinctly Christian slant to them. This adaptation of the Psalms was not new, however, as even within their early life in Israelite worship the Psalms had been 'revised and expanded to adapt them to different contexts' (Mays 1994 p10-11). What was new, was that a Christian emphasis could be appropriately placed within material which was pre-Christian.

The difficulty for some Christians was, and continues to be, the vengeful and angry nature of some parts of some of the Psalms and the solution to this problem was the excision of verses deemed inappropriate.

John Patrick in 1678 produced a Psalter which was selective in the verses it included (Morgan 2002) and this tradition of excision has continued to the present day, for the Revised Common Lectionary does not use all the psalms and is happy to omit verses of 'difficult' psalms (e.g. Ps 139:19-22). Murphy suggests that this is the result of 'the unreal piety of the censors' (1992 p26) but it may also reflect an unwillingness to allow such high negative emotion into worship, the church all too frequently being keen to maintain a sense of 'orientation' despite the obvious and observable evidence to the contrary in the world (Brueggemann 2002).

In this context, Methodism may have had an additional burden to bear, for one of the criticisms levelled at John Wesley was that he was an 'enthusiast', something which he strenuously denied. He was fervent in his refutation of such charges and even preached and published a sermon on 'The Nature of Enthusiasm' (Wesley J 1944 p416-428). His prime concern was to show the scriptural and rational basis of faith and of his call to renewal.

'A casual glance at any one of his published sermons... will show how little Wesley valued an emotional appeal, and how much he valued theological exposition.' (Davies 1976 p81)

In the light of such accusations from his critics and in the light of John Wesley's high churchmanship, it is not surprising if, to some extent, emotions were unwelcome in public worship and for this reason the

Psalms were viewed by some with unease. This may have contributed to the gradual shift of the Psalms to the periphery of contemporary Methodist worship.

The Life of the Psalms and Methodism

Within Methodism, the Psalms have led an interesting life. Both John and Charles Wesley learned to sing the Psalms during childhood and continued to incorporate the Psalms into both Sunday worship and daily prayer (Hickman 1989 p111). Charles Wesley, building on the hymnody of Watts, freely re-wrote psalms in verse while ‘christianising’ them heavily. Thus, for example, the 23rd Psalm becomes ‘Jesus the Good Shepherd is, Jesus died the sheep to save’ (Wesley C 1750 p21). John Wesley was prepared to condemn some parts of the Psalms as ‘improper’ (Wesley J cited in UMPH 1984 p9), and, as a consequence, when adopting the psalms in the Book of Common Prayer into the Methodist prayer book ‘The Sunday Service’ he removed 34 of the 150 psalms and removed verses from a further 58 psalms (White in UMPH 1984 p18), Both brothers were apparently determined, however, that psalms should continue to form part of Methodist worship. Singing psalms was a regular feature of worship led by John Wesley and he was ‘grieved’ when he found Methodists who did not sing psalms. (Mulrain 2002 p3)

As a result, metrical psalms have been part of the last two Methodist hymnbooks, the Methodist Hymn Book (Methodist Conference Office (MCO) 1933) and Hymns & Psalms (Methodist Publishing House (MPH) 1983). In the 1933 book, the hope was that the inclusion of a selection of Psalms would lead to ‘a great enrichment of public worship (MCO 1933 piii) and that the music would be ‘simple and effective’ (op. cit. piv). The later book, however, in its ‘Introduction to the Canticles and Psalms’, states that ‘the psalms are set out for congregational *reading*’ (MPH 1983-emphasis mine) and there seems to be an assumption that reading rather than singing is the preferred method of incorporating psalms into worship.

This assumption is reinforced in Faith and Worship, the Local Preacher Training Course of the Methodist Church, which states, without any supporting evidence, that, ‘it is, of course, fairly rare for psalms to be sung in Methodist churches...However, the practice of reading them is quite widespread.’ (Lampard 1992 Unit 8 p11). As a means of continuing the tradition within Christian worship, Local Preachers are encouraged to incorporate a psalm into their service ‘at least on occasion’ (ibid.). There are some suggestions for how to incorporate the psalm into a service and a further suggestion that the psalm can be read responsorially, but no information about alternative ways of involving the congregation in the saying or singing of the psalm and no attempt to

address the issue of how to use the ‘difficult’ psalms that express anger or vengeance. This flies in the face of Eugene Peterson’s conclusion that for leaders in the faith community ‘apprenticeship in the Psalms is not an option; it is a mandate.’ (Peterson 1987 p57).

There is, however, much in the literature to suggest that the loss of the Psalms in worship leads to an impoverishment of our relationship with God, restricting us to positive, happy emotions and sentiments towards God which are not always an accurate reflection of our relationship with God (Carney 1983, Nichols 1992, Brueggemann 2002). The Psalms offer us accepted and acceptable ways of offering up all our emotions, even negative and vengeful emotions, to God and as such are an important and valuable part of worship. The Psalms allow all types of speech to God, polite and praising speech which seems to be the preferred mode of speech of many churches, but sometimes also angry, desperate or despairing speech. The use of the Psalms in worship helps to teach people how to pray, allows congregations to speak to God honestly, for as Chamberlain suggests, ‘Prayer is not real unless it is honest’ (1984 p12). Worship that is not honest, which does not reflect the reality of life forces people into cognitive dissonance, drives them away from worship as they can no longer make a valid connection between what happens in worship and what is happening in the world.

The Psalms have always been part of *public* worship so that they ‘reflect not personal whim but communal value’ (Norris 1997 px). This communal value is not merely what the worshipper shares with the rest of the assembled congregation but also with worshippers throughout the ages. This helps a person in distress to be united with the community of faith and ‘invites them to emerge from their isolation’, while allowing the community to act as intercessors, even when they may be unaware of a problem within the congregation (McCutchan 1992 p140).

The Psalms have enjoyed a significant role in the worship of God’s people since their first use some three thousand years ago. Their universal language, the broad spectrum of emotions expressed and their ability to voice the very best and very worst of human nature has ensured their continued use. The fact that they speak to God, allow dialogue with God, means that they are to be used by the worshipper in community as well as individually. Their communal use in worship helps each worshipper to share not only her own burdens but also the burdens of others and it is this communal experience which is of such importance in counteracting the individualism of the present age. These Psalms are not, therefore, to be spoken by an individual to the congregation but are to be shared in singing or speaking so that all may own and participate in the situations and emotions described. The apparent loss of Psalms to Methodist worship, despite the fact that ‘Methodism was born in song’

(MCO 1933 piii) and continues to sing her theology, is not only contrary to Christian tradition and Wesley's desires for the Methodist Society, detaching Methodists from their Christian heritage, but also renders Methodist less able to enter into an honest, dialogical relationship with God in which their true emotions can be spoken and, through speech with God, transformed so that we are 'lost in wonder, love and praise' (Wesley C in Methodist Publishing House 1983 no. 267 v3). As will become evident from the results of the congregational questionnaire, the current impoverishment of Methodist worship resulting from the lack of the Psalms has not gone unnoticed and in some cases is much deplored.

The Research

'The Psalms reflect contemporary human experience. They are also a good way of getting congregational participation'¹

The Preachers' Questionnaire

Having established from the literature review the importance of the Psalms in Christian worship and their importance for John Wesley as he sought to establish a pattern of worship for his Societies, the research, amongst lay and ordained preachers in the Lytham St Annes' Circuit of the Methodist Church, was designed to show that the Psalms are used rarely in contemporary Methodist worship and that Methodism is losing touch with this part of mainstream Christian traditions. The literature review also makes it clear that the wide range of emotion expressed in the Psalms is an important resource for the spiritual and pastoral welfare of congregations, allowing worshippers to share experiences and emotions both with God and the congregation, and the research had the additional objective of establishing how wide a range of psalms preachers used. The research was also intended to reveal whether there was a desire amongst preachers to learn more about the Psalms so that they could be used more frequently and with greater confidence. To this end, information was sought about why the Psalms were not used, whether

¹ Comment from one of the completed preacher questionnaires

preachers would be interested in further training on the Psalms and what form they would like any further training to take.

A questionnaire was designed to be presented to all the preachers (preacher is used here to refer to Methodist Local Preachers and ordained Methodist Presbyters) of the Lytham St Annes' Circuit of the Methodist Church in Lancashire. The questionnaire was piloted by two student ministers not in the Lytham St Annes' Circuit and some amendments were made, particularly with regard to the frequency of use of psalms and how preachers choose to use psalms within worship. A question about using the psalm set in the lectionary was not included, an omission which was noticed by only one preacher within the circuit, which is, itself, an interesting comment on the importance attached to the lectionary by preachers.

Within Methodism, worship is led both by ordained ministers and by local preachers and both these groups have almost total autonomy with regard to the format of Sunday morning worship. Forms for Morning Worship and the ordering of Holy Communion, together with the Revised Common Lectionary, are to be found in The Methodist Worship Book, (Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 1999) but preachers are free to select different readings than those offered in the lectionary and are also free to arrange the service in any appropriate order. The preachers thus have considerable influence on whether the Psalms are used in worship,

and it is unlikely that a congregation would specifically ask a preacher to include a psalm in worship.

The Lytham St Annes' Circuit has an enviably long list of local preachers and supernumerary ministers together with four full-time ordained ministers and the questionnaire was offered to all preachers who lead worship at least once per quarter and/or who attend the Local Preachers' Meeting. This resulted in twenty-nine questionnaires being issued and, although preachers were free to refuse the questionnaire, all chose to complete and return it. Seventeen were issued at a Local Preachers' Meeting and a further twelve questionnaires were sent out by post. While twenty-nine preachers is a small number when compared with the total number of preachers in British Methodism², the fact that all questionnaires were completed and returned means that the sample is fully representative of the Lytham St Annes' Circuit and presents an accurate picture of preachers' attitudes to Psalms in this area. Between them, these twenty-nine preachers conduct worship at six churches and one Methodist Home for the Aged and there are an average of 140 acts of worship per quarter within the circuit.

The preachers' response to the questionnaire showed that they had a considerable amount of preaching experience. Almost half³ had been

² 0.2% - 12041 'preachers' in British Methodism - 9951 active Local Preachers and 2090 Presbyters

³ 13 out of 29 - 45%

preaching more than twenty years and three-quarters⁴ had been preaching for more than ten years. This made it quite clear that they would be able to supply reliable information about changes in the use of the Psalms over time and that any lack of use of the Psalms was not the result of inexperience of preaching. When preacher experience was related to frequency of preaching per quarter, no correlation could be found, the most common frequency being three to four times per quarter.

Of the twenty-nine preachers, twenty-six⁵ claimed to use the Psalms when leading worship, two failed to respond to this question and only one claimed not to use the Psalms in worship. This was an encouraging start, since it appeared that the Psalms were not totally absent from Methodist worship and that there was much interest in the Psalms amongst the preachers. It was now important to establish how they used the Psalms within worship, and to relate their modes of use to those highlighted in the literature review.

One of the most revealing questions related to how preachers made use of psalms and the frequency with which they used them. The question elicited responses from twenty-seven of the twenty-nine preachers with some categories being scored by all twenty-seven respondents and the lowest score for any one category being eighteen,

⁴ 22 out of 29 – 76%

⁵ almost 90%

which appeared to indicate considerable use of the Psalms. However, the high response rate for each of the different categories of use was tempered by the frequency of use indicated by the preachers, so that for many categories of use the most common frequency of use indicated was less than one service in eight, the least frequent use available to respondents. (I am aware now that had a column headed 'never' been available, this would perhaps have been used in preference to the 'less than one service in eight' column.) If the frequency of use, for example less than one service in eight, is then linked to the frequency of preaching, for example three to four times per quarter, we have a situation where that particular use of the Psalms may occur only twice a year for some preachers. What seemed like a high response rate for the use of Psalms proves to be rather illusory with the result that congregations may experience the Psalms in worship only very rarely.

Use of the Psalms in Worship

Looking in more detail at the results of the question relating to how preachers use the Psalms, we find that all twenty-seven claimed to use the Psalms for the opening call to worship and as a responsive reading between an individual and the congregation. I shall turn first to the use of psalms as a call to worship and then consider the issue of responsive reading.

With regard to the call to worship, it must immediately be noted that in such a use of a psalm the congregation is not necessarily made aware of the source of this call to worship. Furthermore, the call to worship tends to be both short, a maximum of four or five verses, and very positive, so that in general only psalms of praise or thanksgiving would be used. Of the twenty-seven who claimed to use psalms for the call to worship, more than half used them fairly infrequently⁶. When frequency of preaching is taken into account, we find that the preachers who use psalms for the call to worship every service, only preach approximately three times per quarter, so that their claim of frequent use is somewhat diminished. The chart (1 below) shows the frequency of use of the Psalms as a call to worship alongside the frequency of preaching of the preachers and shows how the less frequent use of a psalm as call to worship is associated with an increasing frequency of preaching. The overall impression is that a psalm is not often used as a call to worship. Moreover, even where congregations are fully aware of this use of a psalm, they are still likely only to hear short snippets of psalms of praise and thanksgiving.

⁶ 4 used them every service; 6 used them 1 service in 2; 10 used them in 1 service in 3-8 and seven used them less than 1 service in 8

Chart 1

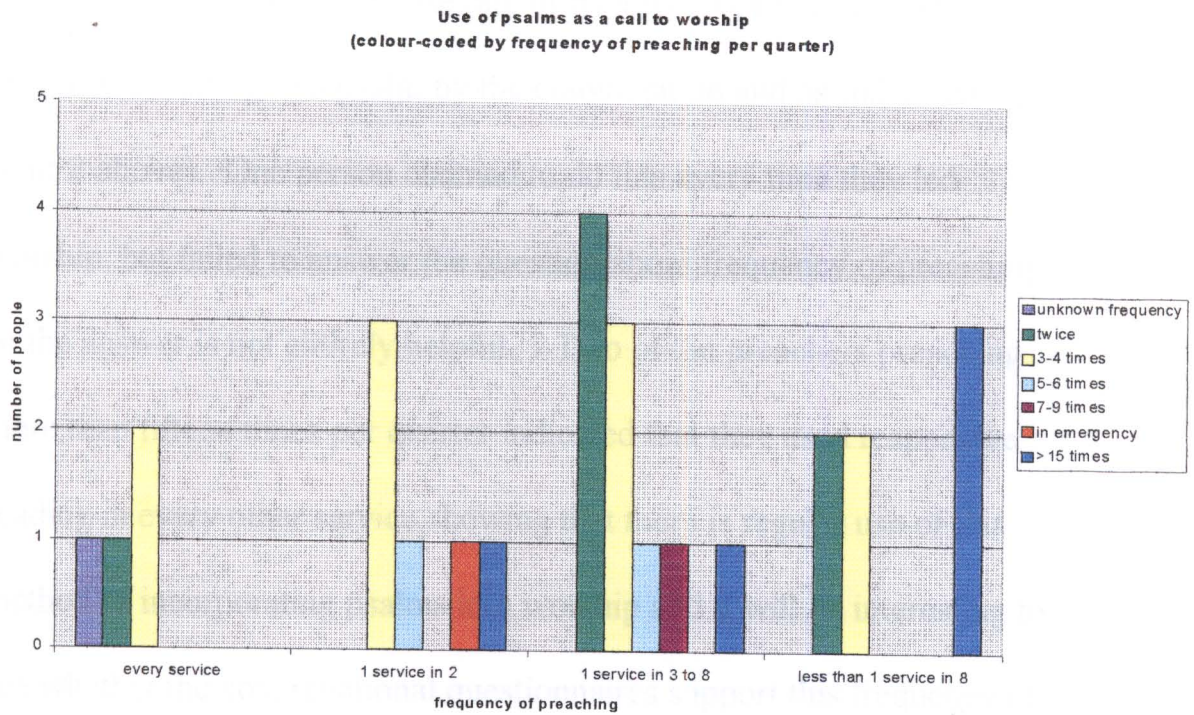
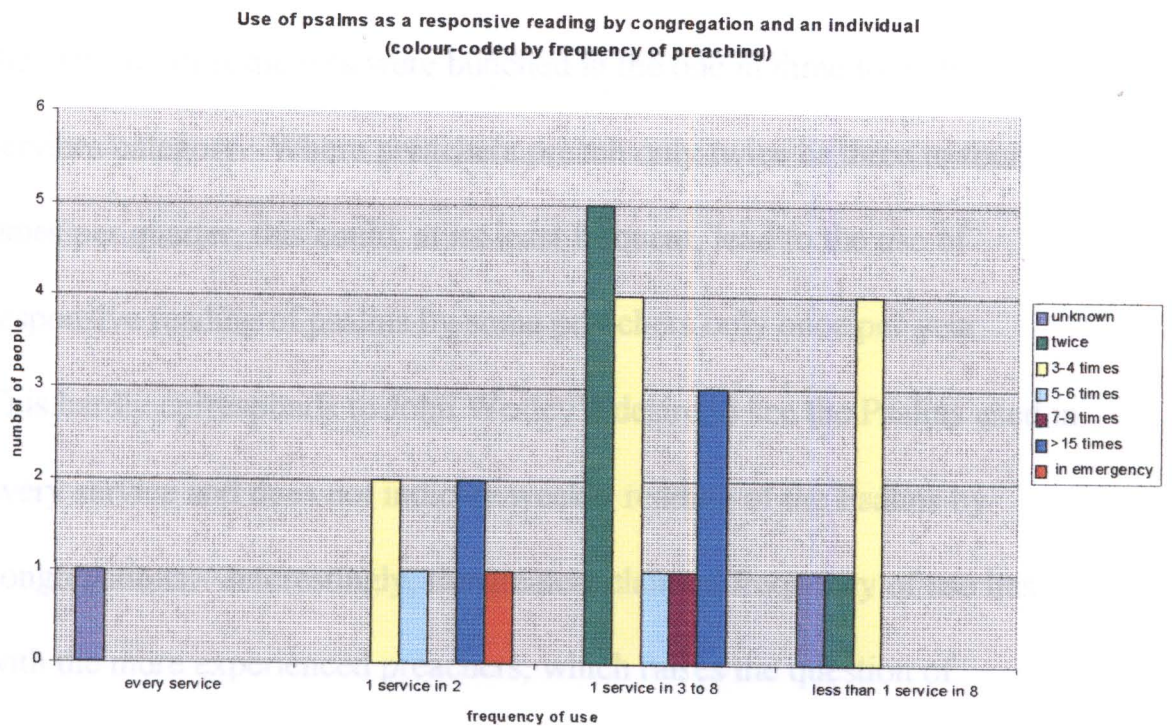


Chart 2



An equally high response rate of twenty-seven was found for responsive reading of a psalm by the congregation and an individual (see chart 2 above). One person claimed to do this every time they led worship, but failed to answer the question about frequency of preaching so the answer is not entirely helpful. Two of the preachers preaching more than fifteen times per quarter indicated that they used responsive reading in every other service showing that there is regular use of this method of incorporating psalms into worship and it will be interesting to see whether the congregational questionnaires support this frequency of use.

However, two out of twenty-seven preachers, however frequently they preach, represents only 7% of those who answered this question and the majority of responses were bunched in the one in three to eight services category. Where preachers preach only twice or three to four times per quarter, this could, at its least frequent, lead to the use of responsive reading of psalms by some preachers only once per year. This hardly corresponds to John Wesley's desire to see the Psalms used in every service and does not indicate weekly reading of the Psalms by congregations. Interestingly, the greatest claimed frequency of use lies with the more experienced preachers, which raises the question of whether the more experienced preachers were better trained in the use of

the Psalms or whether their life experiences have helped them better to appreciate the Psalms for the emotional range and expression they offer.

The next most frequent use of the Psalms by preachers is as an introduction to the prayers of adoration. Twenty-four out of twenty-seven indicated that they used the Psalms in this way but their frequency of use was bunched in the less frequent categories and this, coupled with their own frequency of preaching, makes it clear that the use of psalms as an introduction to the prayers of adoration is not a frequent occurrence. If we then consider that the congregation is probably not aware that a psalm is being used, or if they are aware, may have no idea which psalm is being used, we can see that Methodism is a long way from overt use of the Psalms in worship. Furthermore, the psalm, which, because of the context, is likely to be a psalm of praise or thanksgiving, is spoken by the preacher, not the congregation, so that the communal use of the Psalms which was revealed in the literature review also appears to have been abandoned in this Methodist community.

Similar comment can be made about the use of the Psalms to introduce prayers of supplication, thanksgiving and confession, for although the response rate is comparatively high, never falling below eighteen preachers out of twenty-seven, the frequency rate is clustered in the lowest category for frequency of use, i.e. less than one service in eight.

With regard to the singing of the Psalms, most preachers claimed that they were sung by the congregation or by the choir at less than one service in eight. The absence of a 'never' category may have compelled preachers to use this frequency rather than leave this category of use blank. My personal experience of this circuit is that I have never heard a psalm sung, either when preaching or when worshipping, either by the congregation or by a choir, and I suspect that this experience is common to many of the preachers.

In response to a question about the use of psalms as hymns, that is to say choosing a hymn because it is based on a psalm, there was a narrow majority⁷ against using Psalms in this way and there seemed to be no significant trend in the spread of answers, although there was a slight movement away from the use of psalms as hymns as the experience of the preachers increased. Given that forty-seven of the hymns in *Hymns & Psalms* (MPH 1983) are labelled as 'based on Psalm ...' and that there are approximately 830 references to the Psalms in the index to biblical texts at the back of the hymnbook (op. cit. pxxiv-pxxxix), it seems a little surprising that there is not more conscious use made of the Psalms in the form of hymns. The more modern songbooks (e.g. *Mission Praise* or *Songs of Fellowship*) which also contain songs based on psalms have not

⁷ 13 positive and 15 negative responses

been taken into account in this research since the six churches within the circuit do not all make use of the same contemporary hymnbooks.

In general, the preachers revealed that their use of Psalms is rarely congregational and perhaps not surprisingly, the longer established preachers made greater use of the Psalms. Again this begs the question whether this is the result of better training in the use of the Psalms when they trained, compared with the situation today. It may equally point to the more experienced preachers have a better understanding of the Psalms and a better understanding of the role of the Psalms in relating to contemporary life experiences.

These statistics regarding use by preachers' of the Psalms paints a rather sorry picture and confirms that the Psalms are used rarely in contemporary Methodist worship in this circuit. Conversely, there is evidence that some are continuing to use the Psalms and that in some instances greater experience as a preacher leads to a greater readiness to use the Psalms. When asked if they would like help in incorporating the Psalms into worship, a narrow majority of the preachers⁸ indicated that they would, but the more experienced preachers were the more reluctant to accept additional training.

⁸ 15 positive and 12 negative responses

Range of Psalms Used

As I have already suggested with regard to psalms used as call to worship, the types of psalms used by the preachers fall into two main categories – praise⁹ and thanksgiving¹⁰ – and while use is concentrated in those who lead worship either twice or three to four times per quarter, use is spread across the experience range, with a slight increase in favour of the more experienced preachers (see charts 3 and 4 below). Psalms of lament are used by a very limited number of preachers as are plea psalms¹¹. Again the more experienced preachers seem to make the better use of the full range of Psalms, which might point to life experience having a part to play in understanding and using the full range of psalms. However, when we look at frequency of preaching, only one of the frequent preachers¹² makes use of psalms of lament and plea. Frequency of preaching for these two psalm categories is concentrated amongst the infrequent preachers¹³.

⁹ 16 claimed to use praise psalms – 55%

¹⁰ 17 claimed to use thanksgiving psalms – 58%

¹¹ 7 use plea psalms; 4 use lament psalms, of who 3 have more than 20 years' experience

¹² more than 15 times per quarter

¹³ 3 preaching twice per quarter and 3 preaching 3-4 times per quarter.

Chart 3

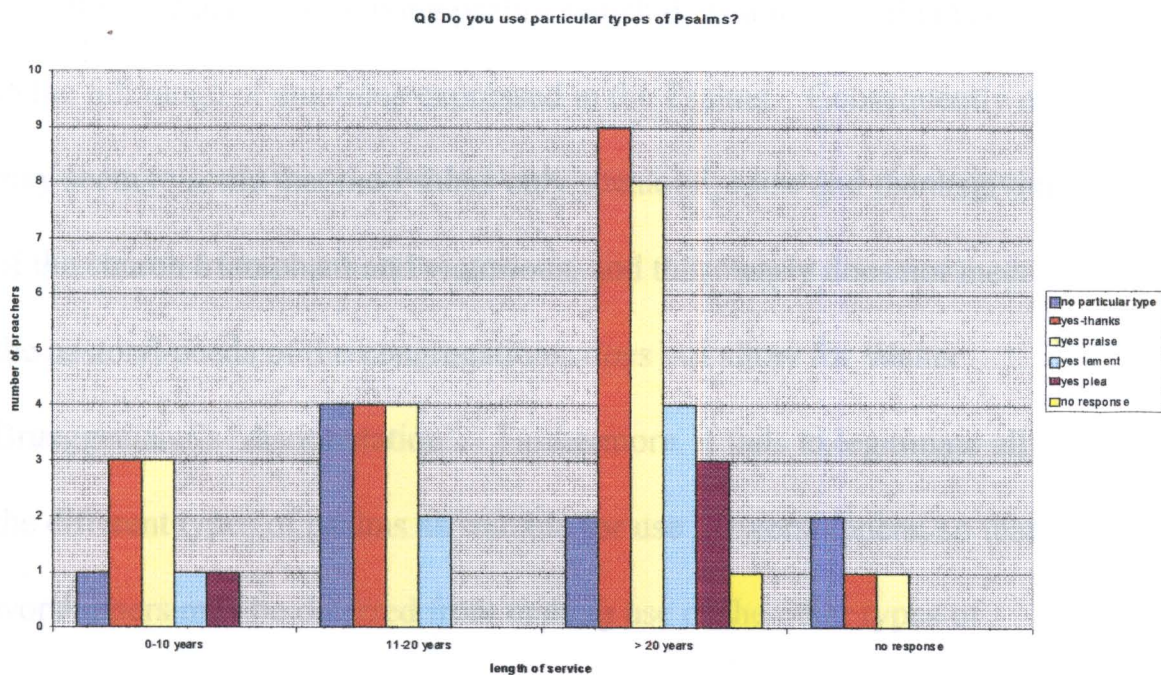
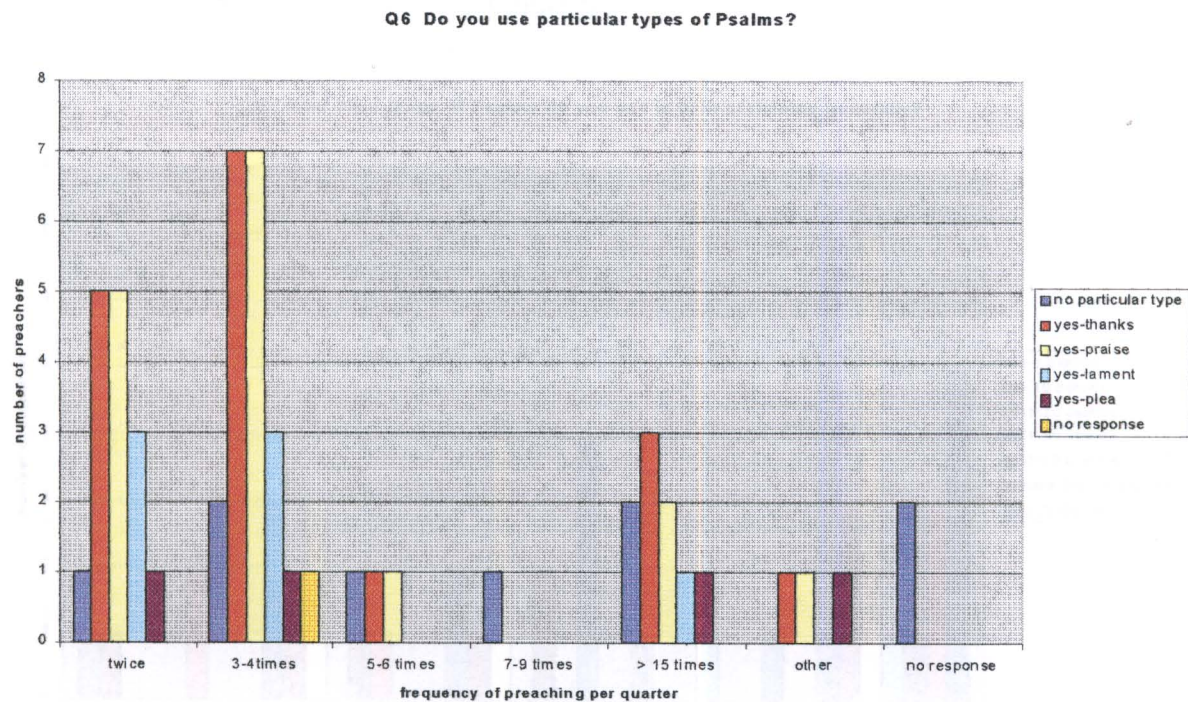
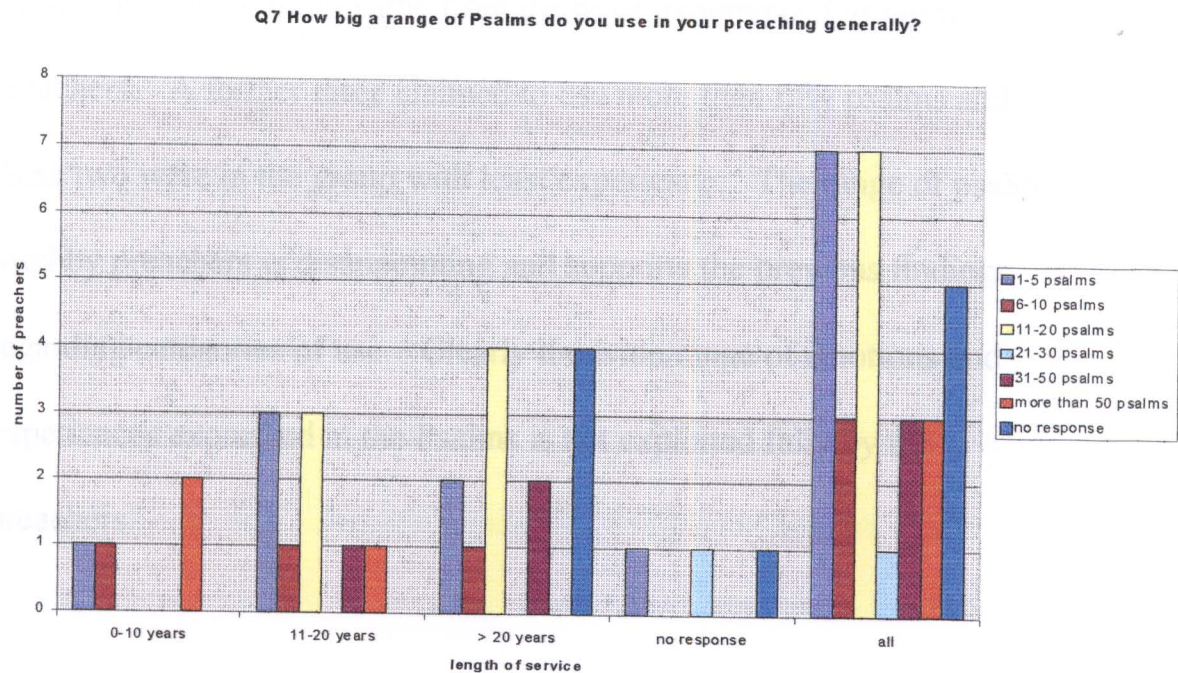


Chart 4



It can be seen from these results that the congregations tend to get a diet of praise and thanksgiving psalms which does not allow them access to the full range of emotions expressed in the Psalms. Consequently it may seem to some that the Psalms only speak of praise and thanksgiving, of the church triumphant and victorious, and this clearly does not meet the pastoral needs of the congregations, does not allow for Walter Brueggemann's 'disorientation'. Furthermore, it fails to legitimate all the different types of psalms as suitable for use by worshippers, so that worshippers may be deterred from making use of the other types of Psalms in their personal devotions, either because they are unaware of their existence or because they assume that since these psalms are not used in church, they should not be used privately either.

Chart 5



Further evidence of the limited use of psalms by preachers is found in their response to a question regarding the number of psalms they thought they used (see chart 5 above). This question drew the highest rate of ‘no response’ with five out twenty-nine failing to answer the question and those who filled in the questionnaire at the Local Preachers’ meeting clearly struggled with this question, as if they had never given much thought to how many psalms they used. The fact that many preachers claimed to use a relatively restricted number of psalms suggests that use of the lectionary Psalm is limited, particularly bearing in mind that only one person commented on the lectionary in their responses. Seven claimed to use one to five psalms and another seven claimed to use eleven to twenty psalms. Only three claimed to use thirty-one to fifty psalms and two of these came from the most experienced group of preachers. A further three claimed to use more than fifty psalms and of these two were in the group with least experience. The range of psalms used by preachers is disappointing and supports the previous findings regarding categories of use. Clearly the wide range of emotions and experiences expressed in the Psalms is not exploited fully by the preachers.

When asked about their reasons for using the Psalms, most preachers¹⁴ indicated that the psalms related to the theme of the service as a whole. Seventeen indicated that the use of a psalm added meaning to the service, ten claimed that the psalm reflected current events and nine indicated that the psalm reflected the content of the prayers. There was no perceptible difference in use between preachers with more or less experience. Eight offered ‘other reasons’ for using the Psalms only one of which was a reference to the Psalm being set in the Lectionary. Two felt that the language of the Psalms was important and a third suggested that a psalm helped balance the new with the old. One used a psalm to reflect the theme of the sermon and two suggested that psalms reflect the wide range of contemporary experience. One claimed to use psalms in order to encourage congregational participation.

The findings with regard to reasons for the use of psalms corroborate the findings of the literature review. Despite the age of the Psalms, they are sufficiently universal to support contemporary Christian worship, reflecting themes in the service, prayers and sermon. The wide range of human emotions and experiences in the Psalms still speak to our situation. There is a sense in which these preachers have a rather hazy perception that the Psalms are a valuable tool in worship, are able to appreciate their continued capacity to meet the life experiences of the

¹⁴ 22 out of 29

Christian disciple but are not quite sure how to make full use of the Psalms more frequently.

It is striking that no-one suggested that use of the Psalms was in any way linked to Christian or Methodist tradition, from which it might be concluded that using psalms as a means of connecting a congregation to the church universal is not an important factor in preachers' preparation of worship. There was also no mention of the Psalms being the only scripture by which worshippers are able to talk *to* God. It would seem that the use already made of the Psalms offers fertile ground here for further training.

Reasons for not using the Psalms elicited more responses than from the one person who claimed not to use the Psalms, suggesting that even preachers who do use the Psalms have valid reasons for not using the Psalms on occasion. Two suggested that they disliked the language used in the psalms at the back of Hymns & Psalms (MPH 1983) and two others suggested that the language of the Psalms was 'archaic' and 'irrelevant'. One suggested that the 'right' hymn expressed things better, another suggested that they did not like chanting psalms, and a third suggested that they 'failed to speak to the context of our times'. The suggestions about language and failing to speak to the modern context do not concur with the findings of the literature review and contradict some of the answers from the preachers regarding why they use Psalms. Again there

is clear scope for training in the understanding and use of the Psalms, perhaps suggesting other methods of singing the Psalms (i.e. not chanting) and other translations and paraphrases of the Psalms which might help to overcome the perceived language difficulty.

Preachers had noticed a change in the use of the Psalms over their preaching career, fourteen saying that they were used less often and six claiming that there used more often. When asked for reasons for this change, eight responded, all of whom were in the more experienced categories of preacher. The principal change seemed to be that in the past psalms were sung regularly but this is no longer the case. Only one preacher suggested that Local Preacher training had not encouraged the use of psalms, indeed had not really seen the use of psalms as part of Local Preacher training, which concurred strongly with the findings of the literature review.

The results of the preacher questionnaire strongly support the proposition that the Psalms are used rarely in contemporary Methodist worship, yet at the same time demonstrate that lack of use of the Psalms may be linked to inadequate knowledge and, to some extent, limited experience of leading worship. At the same time preachers showed some understanding of the importance of the Psalms for expressing emotions and for speaking to most life situations and gave grounds for believing that with training and encouragement preachers might make greater use

of the Psalms in the future. Regrettably there seemed to be little understanding of the importance of the Psalms in Christian tradition generally and in the Methodist tradition in particular. Analysis of the results of the congregational questionnaire will show what effect the preachers' attitudes have had on the congregations' perceptions of psalms in worship and will indicate to what extent the congregations feel deprived as a result of the preachers' limited use of the Psalms in public worship.

The Congregational Questionnaire

*'Psalms express so clearly my hopes and fears and are not said enough'*¹⁵

In addition to the preacher questionnaire outlined above, a congregational questionnaire (appendix 3) was also undertaken in the six churches of the Lytham St Annes' Circuit. The questionnaire was designed to show worshippers' appreciation of the use of the Psalms in worship and to allow a comparison to be made between their perception of the use of the Psalms and the preachers' claimed use of the Psalms. The questionnaire was also intended to find support for the evidence in the literature review regarding the importance of the Psalms in enriching worship and in enhancing the spiritual and pastoral welfare of the individual worshipper and, if such support were evident in the congregational responses, to consider further whether there was a desire for psalms in Sunday worship. The questionnaire was also an opportunity to find out more about the change in use of the Psalms in Methodist worship over time.

The questionnaire was piloted on a church house group who insisted that in question 3 it was imperative to have the frequency option of 'never' and that question 5 should offer the option 'I don't know'. The finalised questionnaire was offered after morning worship over six successive

¹⁵ Comment from a completed congregational questionnaire

Sundays¹⁶ to the six congregations and worshippers had the options of completing the questionnaire immediately, taking the questionnaire home and returning it the following week or simply not filling in the questionnaire. For the most part, worshippers chose to fill in the questionnaire immediately. In my spoken introduction to the questionnaire I encouraged participants to give their impressions, rather than carefully calculated answers, so that the results present a snapshot of worshippers' perceptions of the use of psalms in worship.

The Congregations

Three hundred and ninety-nine questionnaires were distributed across the circuit and three hundred and thirty-three were returned, that is to say 83%.¹⁷ It must be remembered, however, that these three hundred and thirty-three respondents represent an insignificant proportion of British Methodism.¹⁸ The results (appendix 4) are discussed below as a whole, rather than by individual congregations, since all six congregations are fairly sociologically similar coming from white, middle-class urban backgrounds, and since no one congregation showed any particular difference from any other congregation. Furthermore, at some time in the course of a year all the congregations in the

¹⁶ from 9.3.3 to 13.4.3

¹⁷ Distribution and return of questionnaires as follows:

Lytham - 41/56-73%; The Drive 36/51-70%; Church Road - 112/132-85%; Freckleton - 52/60-87%; Kirkham - 33/39 - 85%; Fairhaven 59/61 - 97%. n.b. Fairhaven is my home church, which probably explains the high return.

¹⁸ Membership approx 323,820 – 333 represent 0.1% of the membership

Circuit are preached to by all the preachers in the Circuit so that there was, again, no reason to treat any congregation individually.

Just over half¹⁹ of the respondents have worshipped in a Methodist context for more than forty years, which should help to provide a fairly accurate picture of the changes in the use of the Psalms in Methodist worship over time. It also reflects the ageing of church congregations generally and reinforces the view that the Circuit is typical of church congregations across the country. The remaining respondents were fairly evenly spread²⁰ across the other length of worship categories. The range of length of worship corresponds quite well to the length of service of the preachers and was substantially similar across all six churches. The long experience of worship within the Circuit suggests that we can expect good evaluation of change and a committed approach to completing the questionnaire. A good proportion of the Circuit take worship very seriously judging by how long they have worshipped in a Methodist context.

Frequency of worship is also very high with almost three-quarters²¹ of worshippers attending worship more than ten times per quarter and a further 18%²² attending from seven to nine services per quarter. Clearly, worshippers should have a clear picture of what happens in Sunday worship. Moreover,

¹⁹ 179/333 respondents – approximately 54%

²⁰ 30/333 – 9% worshipping 0-5 years in Methodism; 24/333 – 7% 6-10 years; 33/333 – 10% 11-20 years; 28/333 – 8% 21-30 years; and 39/333 – 12% 31-40 years

²¹ 237/333 – 71% attend worship more than 10 times per quarter

²² 61/333 respondents

when we consider both the length of worship and frequency of worship, we find that those worshippers with more than forty years' experience of Methodist worship are also the worshippers who are most likely to worship more than ten times per quarter²³. This suggests both that they are deeply committed to their faith and that comments on the Psalms will stem from a considerable experience of life and worship.

Use of the Psalms in Worship

A question relating to how and how often the Psalms were used in worship led to some highly contradictory results in which for every type of use there were some who responded 'every service' and others who responded 'never'. Except for the category reading by an individual, however, the number of responses for 'every service' was always smaller than that for 'never', even if for several cases²⁴ the numbers were almost equal. 'Never' strongly outweighed 'every service' responses in 'singing by the congregation' and in all the categories relating to the use of the Psalms to introduce different forms of prayers. Some of the 'every service' responses, for example 'singing (of a Psalm) by the choir', are highly surprising, since they have never happened in my eight years' experience of leading or participating in worship in this circuit and at least one church does not have a regular choir! On reflection it would appear that the (mis)use of the 'every service' category

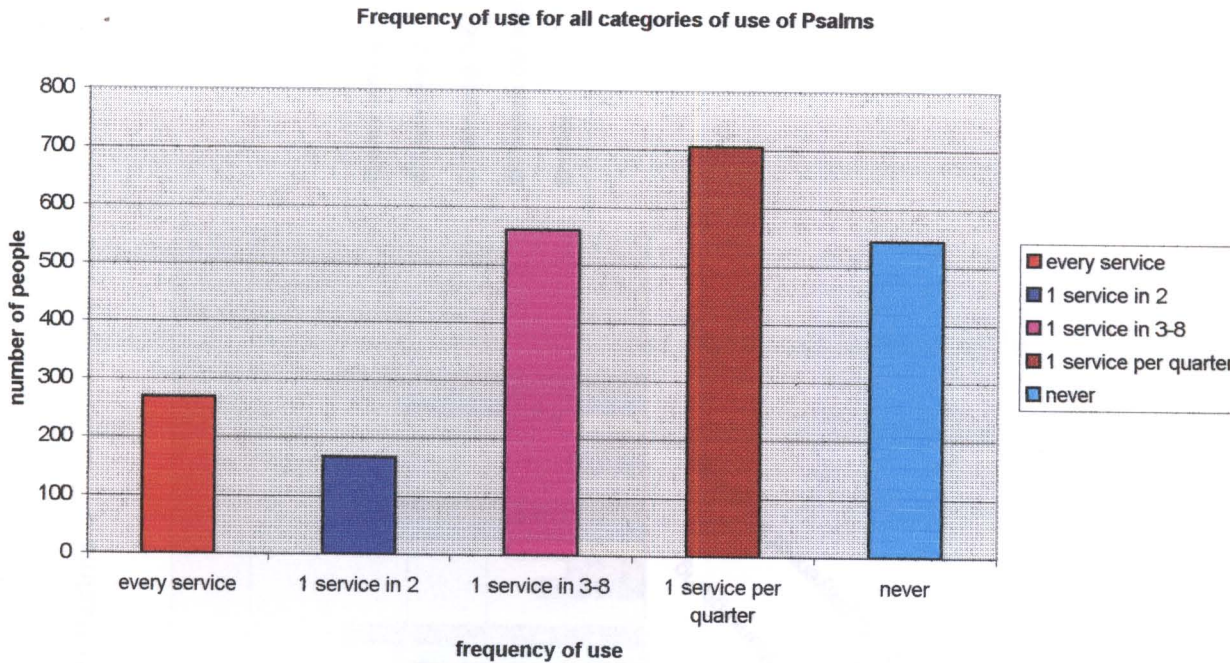
²³ 148 of the 179 who have been worshipping in a Methodist context for more than 40 years.

²⁴ singing by choir; call to worship; reading by individual.

may be attributed to any of the four following options - firstly that the question was misunderstood and was taken to refer to the components of worship itself and not the Psalms in particular; secondly that the lack of introduction of a Psalm by the preacher leads to misunderstanding about when a Psalm is being used; thirdly that worshippers are not really aware of what was meant by a Psalm; and fourthly that different worshippers have very different impressions of worship. I did consider excluding the 'every service' responses from the analysis on the basis of my own knowledge that none of these uses of the Psalms happened every service at any of the six churches, but on reflection retained these responses as a comment on congregational understanding of the use of the Psalms in Sunday worship.

Taken overall (see chart 6 below), the results with regard to frequency revealed that the most common frequency rated by respondents was 'one service per quarter' with 'one service in three to eight' being the second most frequently rated and 'never' the third most highly rated. Even before closer analysis of how these frequency of use ratings are distributed across the categories of use, it is clear that worshippers have the impression that the Psalms are used infrequently in Methodist worship and that they are not used as frequently as might have been expected from the literature review. This infrequent use does, however, fit with the picture gained from the results of the preacher questionnaire.

Chart 6

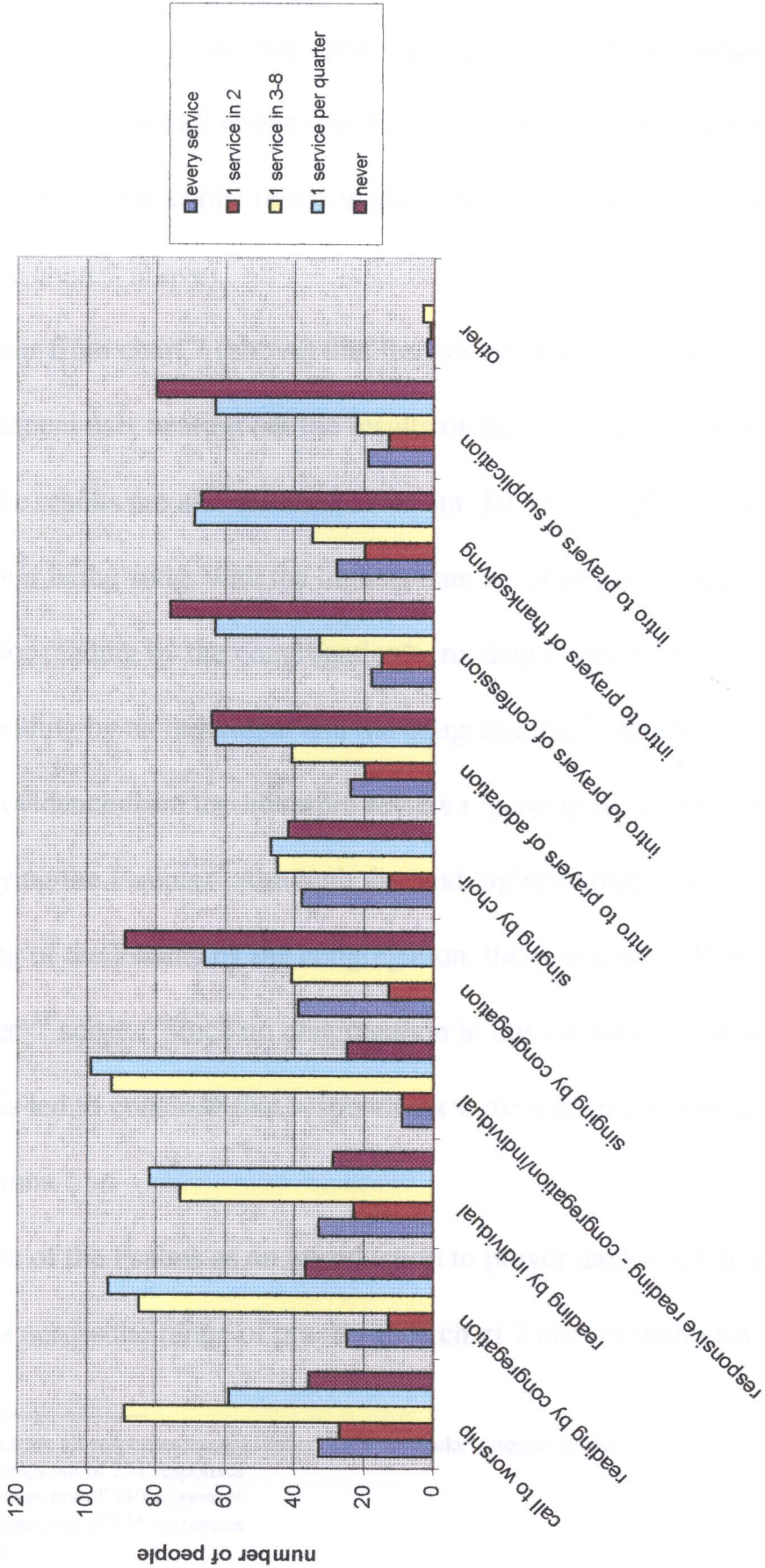


As might be expected from the results of the preacher questionnaire, the use of a Psalm for the call to worship is the only category of use with ‘one service in three to eight’ as the highest frequency rating (see chart 7 below). The remaining categories of use have either ‘one service per quarter’ or ‘never’ as the highest rated frequency of use. Use of a psalm for the call to worship also has the highest rating for ‘one service in two’. Surprisingly, perhaps, even this category of use received a significant number of ‘never’ responses²⁵.

²⁵ 36/244 – 15% with 33/244 – 14% for ‘every service’

Chart 7

Congregational perception of use of Psalms



For the three following categories of use (see chart 7 above), the highest frequency of use response was ‘one service per quarter’ and for a further five categories of use (see chart 7 above) the highest frequency of use response was ‘never’. ‘Singing by the choir’ received the most evenly balanced set of responses (see chart 7 above).

It is clear from chart 7 (above) that frequency of use is strongly biased towards infrequent use, bearing out the results of the preacher questionnaire in this area. The results are also inclined to favour the reading of the Psalms, rather than their being sung, with the highest number of positive responses²⁶ being found for reading by the congregation²⁷, reading by an individual²⁸ and responsive reading by an individual and the congregation²⁹, which further supports the evidence from the literature review regarding the move from singing to saying the Psalms. Although the next highest positive score³⁰ was for the singing of the Psalms by the congregation, this score was offset by the highest ‘never’³¹ score. Since no congregation in this circuit ever chants the Psalms, one is led to conclude that respondents were referring to singing psalms as hymns.

The use of the Psalms as an introduction to prayer gained relatively similar scores across the range of prayers (see chart 7 above) with prayers of

²⁶ ‘positive’ responses are all responses except ‘never’ for a particular category of use

²⁷ 217 positive responses out of 254 responses

²⁸ 211 positive responses out of 240 responses

²⁹ 210 positive responses out of 235 responses

³⁰ 159/248 responses

³¹ 89 ‘never’ responses out of 248 responses

adoration and thanksgiving getting higher scores than prayers of confession or supplication. These results again bear out the results of the preacher questionnaire, but it is clear that the frequency of using psalms as an introduction to prayer is relatively low, with positive responses being clustered in the 'one service per quarter' category.

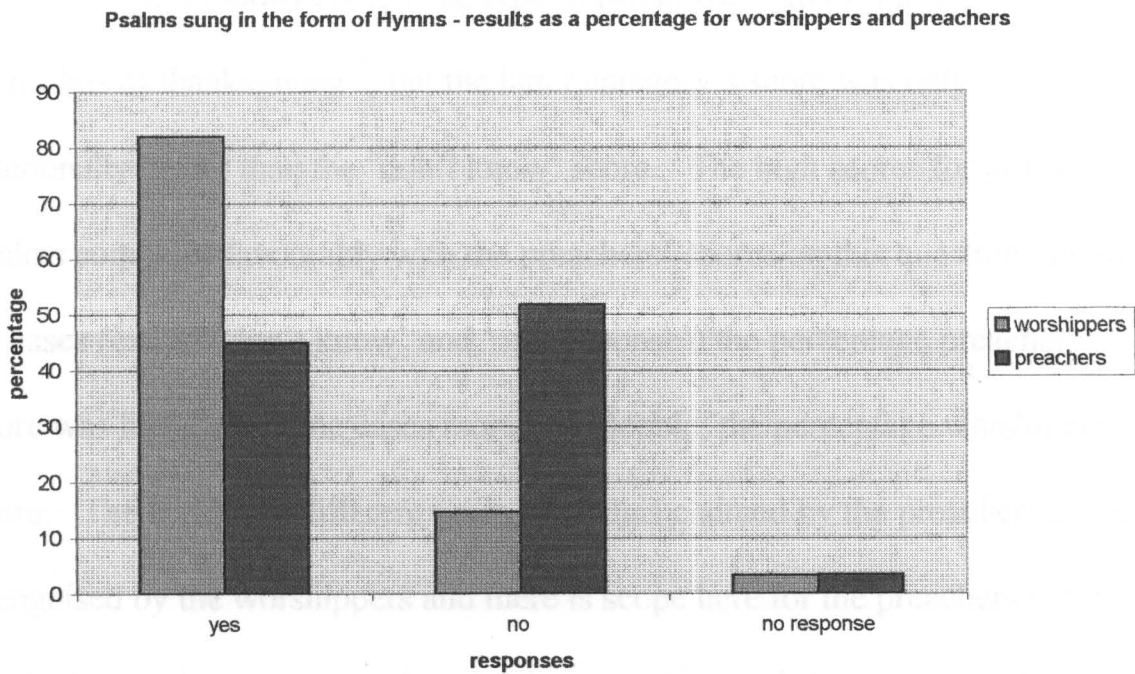
Overall, the perceptions of the congregations within the circuit are very similar to the results produced by the preacher questionnaire, revealing that the Psalms are used relatively infrequently, that they are read rather than sung and that on the whole the Psalms are used in positive contexts, i.e. for calls to worship and introduction to prayers of adoration or thanksgiving. It would seem that the congregations are receiving a rather limited diet of psalms and it is interesting to see that this is reflected in congregational comments about the lack of psalms in worship, which will be discussed below.

Turning to the use of the Psalms as hymns, a huge majority³² claimed that Psalms were sung in the form of hymns and this ties in with the high score for the singing of the Psalms by the congregation mentioned above. This positive response was evident over the entire range of frequency of worship of respondents and strikes a marked contrast to the use of the Psalms as hymns claimed by the preachers where there was a narrow majority against using the Psalms as hymns and where the use of a Psalm in the form of a hymn was clustered in the lower frequencies of preaching (see chart 8 below). This

³² 273/333 respondents – 82%

would seem to suggest that even when hymns are not announced as being based on a Psalm, congregations are aware of this fact, probably because it is marked in the hymnbook, and that congregations are perhaps more familiar with the Psalms as hymns than preachers.

Chart 8



When asked about the types of psalms used, 10%³³ did not respond to the question, a further 11%³⁴ said that no particular type of psalm was used and 27%³⁵ responded that they did not know. This suggests that there is scope for education here, since almost one third of worshippers were unable to recognise different psalm types, so that worshippers are more readily able to recognise the different types of psalms, enabling them to choose appropriate

³³ 33/333

³⁴ 39/333

³⁵ 91/333

psalms in their personal devotions. It is possible that worshippers hear psalms so infrequently that despite the repetitive language and careful literary forms intended to enable recognition of the psalm types, they are unable to distinguish between the different categories of psalms, which suggests that encouraging the preachers to use the Psalms more often would be beneficial.

The most readily recognised type of psalm was that of praise³⁶ followed by psalms of thanksgiving³⁷, but the latter category's score was only fractionally higher than the 'don't know' score. The high scores for praise psalms compares favourably with the preachers' scores on this question, but in all cases (except 'don't know' and 'no response') the percentage preacher score was higher, in some cases more than double, the percentage worshipper score. The use of the different types of psalms claimed by the preachers is not recognised by the worshippers and there is scope here for the preachers to be much clearer about the type of psalm they are using and its importance for worship and the life of faith. Furthermore, the congregations are clearly aware of the use of positive praise and thanksgiving psalms but relatively unaware of the use of psalms of lament and plea, denying them a long-accepted way of expressing their negative emotions to God. As we have seen from the literature review, this is detrimental to spiritual welfare and an impoverishment of worship.

³⁶ 136/333 – 41%

³⁷ 94/333 – 28%

When asked if they heard the same Psalm in worship, just over half ³⁸of respondents replied ‘no’, but a significant minority³⁹ claimed ‘yes’. The ‘no’ response reflects the range of psalms that preachers claimed to use, which is sufficiently large for congregations to hear different psalms in worship, particularly when frequency of preaching and worship are taken into consideration. At the same time, those who claimed to hear the same psalm in worship may reflect the limited range of psalms used by preachers both in terms of numbers of psalms used and in terms of the types of psalms used. If the predominant use is of psalms of praise or thanksgiving, it is not surprising that worshippers feel that they hear the same psalm, given the similarity of language, tone and emotion expressed in these two types of psalm. Moreover, taking into account frequency of use of psalms by preachers, even those worshippers who worship more than ten times per quarter might be forgiven if they cannot accurately remember from one use of a psalm to the next, which may involve a gap of several Sundays, which type of psalm they heard. Only frequent use would create sufficient familiarity for worshippers to be confident in recognising and remembering the psalm or type of psalm used. Both in terms of the types of psalms used and in terms of the response to hearing the same psalm in worship, the congregational results suggest that worshippers are hearing a limited range of psalms.

³⁸ 53% - 178/333

³⁹ 39% - 130/333

Congregational preferences with regard to the Psalms

In contrast, a significant majority of worshippers responded positively to the question of whether they liked a psalm in Sunday worship. Only a tiny number⁴⁰ claimed not to like a psalm in worship and a third of respondents had no opinion. With such a large number in favour of having psalms in Sunday worship and such a small number against, there is clear evidence that worshippers want to have psalms in worship, perhaps even want more psalms than they currently hear. This congregational desire reflects the findings of the literature review and the discussion of congregational comments below will reveal how the lack of psalms in worship is viewed by worshippers. It is perhaps a little surprising that this desire for psalms has not been communicated by congregations to the preachers, since with regard to other items in worship, particularly choice of hymns, congregations are vociferous in their comments to preachers.

Despite the apparent desire for a psalm in Sunday worship, only a relatively small number⁴¹ agreed strongly with the statement that ‘Psalms are important to me as an individual’, while just over double that number⁴² agreed with the statement. The combined total of those who felt that psalms were important to them as individuals was matched by the number of respondents⁴³ who neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. Those who disagreed

⁴⁰ 6% - 19/333

⁴¹ 14% - 46/333

⁴² 32% - 107/333

⁴³ 46% - 153/333

or disagreed strongly with the statement were in a tiny minority⁴⁴. Once again results show, on the one hand, that there is a significant interest in the Psalms which is not being met by the use of psalms in Sunday worship and, on the other hand, that there is a significant lack of interest in the Psalms which may be attributable to lack of knowledge of or lack of familiarity with the Psalms. There is no appreciable difference in response to this question when considered from the length of worship perspective, although the youngest⁴⁵ and the oldest⁴⁶ groups for length of worship in a Methodist context have the highest positive scores, which rather undermines the proposition that greater life experience brings a greater regard for the Psalms.

Analysis of the reasons given for liking the Psalms reveals that the most highly rated answer was that the Psalms help to offer praise⁴⁷, which is not surprising given the way the Psalms are used in Methodist worship in this Circuit. The next most significant response, with approximately one third of respondents⁴⁸, was that the Psalms are helpful for prayer. This ties in with the literature review which showed that despite their age the Psalms use language and expressed emotions which are sufficiently universal to meet contemporary demands and situations. Approximately one quarter⁴⁹ of respondents felt that the Psalms helped them to express their emotions to God, which is a

⁴⁴ 2% - 7/333 disagreed; 0.6% - 2/333 disagreed strongly

⁴⁵ 0-5 years - 17/28 - 61%

⁴⁶ > 40 years - 89/159 - 50%

⁴⁷ 38% - 125/333

⁴⁸ 30% - 100/333

⁴⁹ 24% - 79/333

relatively low response given the literature review's evidence that the Psalms are helpful in offering pastoral support to worshippers. This result surely begs the question, 'How do the other three quarters express their emotions to God?'. A relatively small number⁵⁰ claim that the Psalms help to cheer them up, while even smaller numbers claim that the Psalms help them to express grief or anger⁵¹. Given how many psalms do express grief and how much grief there is in the world this is a surprisingly low number. Yet both the anger and grief statistics reflect the poor use made of the different types of psalms in public worship. The small number of people who find the Psalms useful in expressing anger begs at least three questions – do Methodists not express anger? – do they express their anger in other ways? – do they fail to admit their anger to God? There are serious pastoral care issues here, given the amount of anger that daily living engenders and given the usefulness, evidenced in the literature review, of the Psalms for helping people to cope with their anger.

As a whole, the congregations do not make many positive responses regarding the use of the Psalms and this would seem to reflect the lack of use made of the Psalms in worship. This low response would also suggest that lack of use is leading to increased ignorance of the Psalms, an issue which is raised in the congregational comments about the Psalms which are to be discussed below. At the same time, however, it must be borne in mind that a

⁵⁰ 17% - 58/333

⁵¹ grief – 10% - 33/333; anger – 5% - 18/333

significant minority of worshippers⁵² took the time to write an additional comment about the use of the Psalms in worship which would suggest that the Psalms are perhaps more important to worshippers than preachers would believe.

When looking at the negative opinions about the Psalms, it was immediately evident that many more worshippers had answered this question than had given a negative response to the statement that ‘the Psalms are important to me as an individual’⁵³. The overwhelming majority of respondents claimed ‘I don’t know much about the Psalms’⁵⁴ which offers a good reason for undertaking some education with both preachers and congregations, particularly in the light of the comment from a worshipper that ‘in general they were written prior to the advent of Christianity’. Eight respondents gave other reasons including suggestions that the Psalms were ‘irrelevant’ or ‘out-dated for today’ and that worship should be ‘related to present-day events and problems, yet as we saw in the literature review the Psalms are open and general in both their language and the situations they describe, so that they are capable of application to almost any situation in life today. Three people claimed that the Psalms were too full of anger and two claimed that the Psalms were not Christian. The question of the anger of the Psalms, which was a major problem to John Wesley, as we saw in the

⁵² 21% - 72/333

⁵³ 9/333 respondents disagreed or disagreed strongly with that statement, but 58/333 responded to the question about negative opinion about the Psalms

⁵⁴ 42/58 responses – 72%

literature review, seems largely unknown to present-day congregations. One person claimed that the Psalms were boring.

When asked about changes in the use of the Psalms in worship, almost a third⁵⁵ claimed that there had been no change in the use of the Psalms. This may well be the case since Methodism in this part of Lancashire is the alternative to Roman Catholicism and the Psalms may have been used rarely from the outset in order firmly to distinguish Methodism from Roman Catholicism. However, another third of respondents⁵⁶ claimed that the Psalms were used less often in worship, and the strongest response for this category came from a church where the Psalms used to be sung by the choir each Sunday. In contrast a significant minority⁵⁷ claimed that the Psalms were used more often and it is possible, given that a similarly small number⁵⁸ claimed that the Psalms were sung more, that these respondents are referring to the singing of Psalms in the form of contemporary hymns and songs. Just over a quarter of respondents⁵⁹ claimed that the Psalms were read rather than sung which coincides with the evidence in the literature review relating to the switch from singing to saying the Psalms. Significantly, and as might have been expected, the highest scores for change are to be found amongst the

⁵⁵ 29% - 97/333

⁵⁶ 33% - 111/333

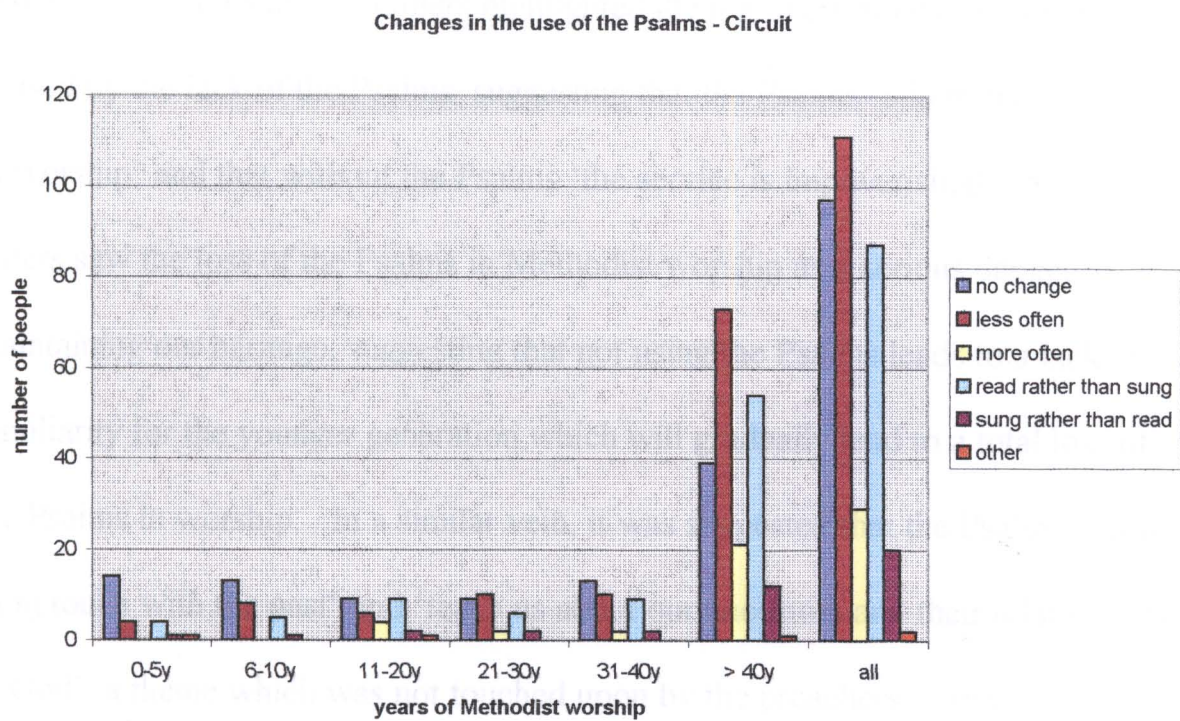
⁵⁷ 9% - 29/333

⁵⁸ 6% - 20 out of 333

⁵⁹ 26% - 87 out of 333

worshippers having the greatest length of worship in a Methodist context (see chart 9 below).

Chart 9



Congregational Comments about the Psalms in Worship

Finally we come to the comments made by respondents regarding the use of the Psalms in worship and their importance to them as individuals. As already mentioned, just over one fifth⁶⁰ of respondents took the trouble to make written comments about the Psalms and worship. Many of the comments referred to the importance of the Psalms for expressing the emotions which we experience as part of daily life and for dealing with ‘the whole spectrum of our faith’, and readily confirm the literature review evidence that the language of the

⁶⁰ 22% - 72 out of 333

Psalms is universal⁶¹ and the Psalms cover a huge range of emotion and experience. One respondent said that ‘the Psalms express so clearly my hopes and fears’ suggesting that they are well aware of the negative emotions expressed in the Psalms. Others highlighted the impoverishment of worship caused by the lack of the Psalms, suggesting that the Psalms ‘add to the quality of worship’ and that without the Psalms ‘the service is impoverished’. Still others saw the loss of the Psalms in Methodist worship as a serious danger to maintaining our heritage, suggesting that not using the Psalms leads to a lack of familiarity for the younger generation which will gradually lead to a total loss of the Psalms in worship. In a similar vein, it was suggested that the Psalms ‘keep us in touch with the past’ and ‘teach us about our ancestors and their relationship to God’, a theme which was not touched upon by the preachers. These comments reflect strongly the findings of the literature review and show that despite their lack of use in Methodist worship, Methodist worshippers are still greatly attached to the Psalms and know very well why the Psalms are important for the individual’s spiritual well-being and why the Psalms are important for the well-being of Methodist worship. It is apparent that worshippers know at least as much about the Psalms as the preachers, who have had the benefit of training, and that possibly the worshippers know more about the benefit of the Psalms than the preachers. There are clearly lessons to be learned, if the

⁶¹ ‘the Psalms speak to us from the distant past in ways which are relevant today’; ‘the words are timeless’.

worshippers in the Lytham St. Annes' Circuit are to receive the quality of worship with regard to the Psalms which they so obviously desire.

Conclusions

'A Christian community without the Psalter has lost an incomparable treasure, and by taking it back into use will recover resources it never dreamed it had.' (Bonhoeffer 1982 p8)

What follows is a review of the objectives of the research in the light of the results obtained together with further discussion of results which have confirmed expectations and, more particularly, the results which have confounded expectations. Further discussion of both the literature review and the research enable suggestions to be made about why and how the use of the Psalms might be improved in Methodist worship. Consideration is also given to how this initial research might be developed in order to provide further evidence of the state of the Psalms within Methodist worship.

As is evident from the literature review, the Psalms have formed an important part of Christian worship from the earliest days of the Church and have been a constant strand in public worship through all the liturgical changes and developments. They are an integral part of the Church's life and consequently play an important role in the tradition of the Church. The research has revealed the divergence between Methodism and other Christian traditions, insofar as Methodism seems to have abandoned this part of its Christian heritage.

When John Wesley formed the Methodist Societies he had no desire to break away from that tradition, but rather desired to remain

firmly within the Church. In this respect, he was clear that Methodism was not a break with the established church and consequently, when developing liturgies for Methodist worship, consistently included the Psalms. Despite his reservations about the content of some of the Psalms, John Wesley was keen to establish a traditional pattern of worship in his societies and the Psalms were one way for Methodism to maintain its links with the tradition of the Church. There is nothing in early Methodism which points to the decline in the use of the Psalms in Methodist worship which we are witnessing today, and John Wesley would no doubt be deeply disturbed by the loss of the Psalms from contemporary Methodism.

As the results have shown, however, a small number of worshippers continues to appreciate the way in which the Psalms can link us to the past and to the traditions of the Church historical. This connection is more readily acknowledged by worshippers than by preachers who show no apparent concern for the role of the Psalms in maintaining Methodism's Christian heritage. The preachers' failure to use the Psalms not only cuts Methodism off from its past, but also forms a significant difference between Methodism and the contemporary practices of other Christian traditions.

The literature review also revealed the universality of the Psalms with regard both to their content and to their language. Despite their age

and the differing life circumstances in which the Psalms were written, they still speak to contemporary situations and express emotions common to humankind in every age. The language is sufficiently universal that it can still appeal to contemporary hearers or readers, enabling them to participate in the emotions expressed, to sense the ‘orientation’ or ‘disorientation’ of the psalmist.

The language is also intimate, creating a dialogical relationship between the worshipper and God. In their original setting, the Psalms were used to bring to mind the covenantal relationship between Israel and God and in their Christian setting they continue to allow worshippers to enter into a dialogical relationship with God. The primary example for Christians of the use of the Psalms for prayer is Christ himself. It is no accident that in his direst agony on the cross, Christ uses a psalm to express his distress, his sense of abandonment, his temporary loss of confidence in God. His use of the Psalms permits Christian use of the Psalms.

Such is the intimacy of the Psalms, that all emotions are permissible, any and all emotions may be uttered to God. The very fact that such a wide variety of psalms have been adopted into the biblical canon legitimates the expression of these emotions to God. Christ has set an example which we may follow. The utterance of emotions, especially negative emotions, has in recent years been seen as

fundamental for the spiritual well-being of the individual. The church has a resource exactly suited to that purpose and it is this resource which is so urgently needed in the church and which is neglected to the detriment of every worshipper. The literature review is quite clear on this point and there is additional evidence from the worshipper questionnaire that this feature of the Psalms is known to them.

While Methodist congregations may not be quite so clear in their thinking about the importance of the Psalms for worship, there is no doubt that a significant minority would like to see greater use of the Psalms in worship. The evidence of the literature review and the responses of worshippers show that the Psalms are considered to be fundamental to Christian worship. These worshippers understand the significance of the Psalms for the life of faith and effectively appreciate the Psalms for many of the reasons outlined in the literature review. They appreciate the importance of tradition and maintaining links with the past, they find the Psalms relevant, despite their great age and they consider that the language of the Psalms is still capable of meeting today's needs.

Despite the considerable importance attached to the Psalms in terms of tradition, emotional expression, and their use in worship in the Church since earliest times, the results of the research confirm that the Psalms are used rarely in Methodist worship in the Lytham St Anne's'

Circuit. As might have been expected, greater use of the Psalms is made by preachers with the longest experience of preaching, and this raises further questions about the nature of preacher training in the past and the influence of life experience on the use of the Psalms, but, as a whole, the preachers' results confirm that their use of the Psalms is limited and that congregations are rarely hearing the Psalms in worship. The congregations confirm this limited use, even suggesting that the use claimed by the preachers is rather greater than the congregations perceive it to be. At least one worshipper commented that this lack of use was an 'impoverishment' of worship, further confirming the results of the literature review. These results furnish no great surprises, confirming as they do the thesis that Psalms are used rarely in contemporary Methodist worship.

The limited use of the Psalms as a whole is further aggravated by the use by preachers of a limited range of psalms. Not only do congregations rarely hear or read the Psalms, but they also hear or read only a limited range of psalms, predominantly psalms of praise and thanksgiving. The congregations are thus further cut off from this valuable resource, having little access in public worship to psalms of lament and plea. The detrimental effect of this loss can only be guessed at, but it is clear from the literature review that the inability to express

negative emotions, to express the dissonance between belief and reality, hinders the development of a truly dialogical relationship with God.

Two areas of the results from the questionnaires confounded my expectations. The first area relates to the use of psalms in the form of hymns. In the light of the fact that ‘Methodism was born in song’ (Methodist Conference Office 1933 piii) and that there are a number of hymns based on psalms in the Methodist hymnbook, it would have been natural to assume that Methodists would sing psalms in the form of hymns. The preachers, however, did not confirm this expectation, a majority of them claiming not to use psalms in the form of hymns. Surprisingly, the congregations gave a much more positive response to this question than might have been expected, showing that they are much more aware of the use of psalms in the form of hymns than are the preachers. Given the number of newer hymns and songs based on psalms, there is scope here for increasing the use of psalms in this form. With regard to the chanting of the Psalms, both congregations and preachers confirmed my expectations that this way of using the Psalms was not looked on favourably and would not provide a means of incorporating more psalms into Methodist worship.

The second area in which my expectations were confounded, related to the knowledge of the Psalms evident in the congregations. As trained leaders of worship, it might have been assumed that the preachers

would have a much greater appreciation and understanding of the Psalms and would comment more favourably on their importance to worship than the congregations. In fact the reverse was the case, the congregations showing considerable evidence of close knowledge of the Psalms and recognising the value of the Psalms to the individual worshipper. It would seem that some members of the congregations are retaining the Psalms in their personal prayers, despite their lack of use in public worship.

It is clear that the Psalms are used infrequently in Methodist worship and that this is detrimental to Methodism as a whole and to individual Methodists. As I have already argued, the loss of the Psalms from worship is not beneficial to congregations, and it is therefore justified to ask what might be the cause of this loss of use and how use of the Psalms might be improved.

One reason for the loss of the Psalms in the Lytham St Annes' Circuit may have been the historical need to differentiate Methodism from Roman Catholicism. The strength of Roman Catholicism in this part of Lancashire has always been a spur to a 'low-church' style of Methodist worship. This need is still evident in some congregations, judging by their unfavourable reactions to, for example, presbyteral vestments, but with the increasing move towards ecumenism, it is to be hoped that this differentiation might soon be found to be unnecessary.

The incorporation of a psalm into worship should be considered not so much ‘papist’ as a return to our early Christian roots. It may even be that Roman Catholic worship has something to teach Methodism about congregational participation in the singing of the Psalms.

A further reason for the loss of the Psalms may be preachers’ failure to utilise the lectionary. Methodism has a strong tradition of preaching on texts which the preacher feels are appropriate to the congregation and not necessarily following any lectionary, a tendency which is perhaps more likely to occur with lay preachers than those who have had ordination training. With the decrease in ordained preachers, the use of lay preachers will increase, so that it is probable that the use of the Psalms in worship will diminish still further.

Inadequate knowledge of the Psalms and inadequate training of preachers in using the Psalms in worship may also contribute to the loss of the Psalms. Preachers are not encouraged by the Local Preacher training course (which both Local Preachers and Presbyters complete) to use the Psalms in worship and as the tradition of using the Psalms in Methodist worship declines, new preachers will not have personal experience of the Psalms in worship on which to build. From this perspective, the decline in the use of the Psalms can only get worse.

In order to remedy this declining use of the Psalms, the first action should be to incorporate additional literature into the Local Preacher

Training Course regarding the use of the Psalms in worship. Further training of preachers who have already completed their training might be possible through appropriate use of the ‘Continuing Local Preacher Development’ programme, which encourages preachers to continue developing their skills in leading worship. Some of the preachers surveyed indicated a willingness to participate in such training and the use of Bible study groups, booklists and discussion groups was suggested.

In addition, training might include suggestions about different ways of using psalms in worship – introduction to the new paraphrases and metrical versions of the Psalms, suggestions for antiphonal reading and other methods of reading psalms which would involve congregational participation, and encouragement to preach from the Psalms, so that not only are psalms heard in worship but their depths are investigated and offered as spiritual help to congregations. Ecumenism also suggests that sharing of best practice between different Christian traditions might also be of value in reversing the decline in the use of the Psalms.

This research has highlighted the plight of the Psalms within Methodist worship in the Lytham St Annes’ Circuit and has shown that without remedial action the Psalms could soon be lost almost entirely from public Methodist worship. It has further made clear the detrimental effect of the loss of the Psalms on the individual and on the Methodist

Church as a whole. It has also raised additional questions about the use of Psalms in worship and suggested new avenues of research, principally in determining how Methodism moved from John Wesley's desire to have a psalm at every service to the current position where psalms are rarely used in worship. It might also be important to establish whether this trend is limited to the Lytham St Annes' Circuit or is a trend with wider significance in Methodism and whether the decline in use of the Psalms in public worship is a trend to be found within other Christian traditions.

If current trends in the use of the Psalms in the Lytham St Annes' Circuit are valid for British Methodism and if the decline shown by this research continues, there will come a time when Methodism breaks irreversibly with tradition and will struggle to retrieve the riches of the Psalter. Methodist worship will then no longer reflect the wishes of its founding preacher and will be immeasurably impoverished as a consequence.

Appendix 1

Preacher Questionnaire

This questionnaire is intended to establish what use is made of the Psalms in worship by Methodist preachers (lay and ordained). It will contribute to a thesis looking into the use of Psalms in Methodist worship and will be complemented by a similar questionnaire addressed to the congregations of the Lytham St Annes Circuit. The thesis forms a substantial part of my Master of Theology (applied) degree which I am undertaking at Chester College of Higher Education through the Northern Ordination Course based in Luther King House, Manchester.

1. How long have you been preaching? (please circle appropriate answer)
 - a. 0-10 years
 - b. 11-20 years
 - c. more than 20 years

2. How often do you preach per quarter? (please circle appropriate answer)
 - a. once
 - b. twice
 - c. 3-4 times
 - d. 5-6 times
 - e. 7-9 times
 - f. 12-14 times
 - g. more than 15 times per quarter

3. Do you use the Psalms in leading worship in church? (Please circle appropriate answer)
 - a. Yes (go to next question)
 - b. No (go to question 9)

4. In what way do you use the Psalms within a service and how often ?
(Please tick the appropriate boxes)

	every service	1 service in 2	1 service in 3 to 8	less than 1 service in 8
call to worship				
reading by congregation				
reading by individual				
responsive reading by individual and congregation				
singing by congregation				
singing by choir				
introduction to prayers of adoration				
introduction to prayers of confession				
introduction to prayers of thanksgiving				
introduction to prayers of supplication				
other (please specify).....				

5. Do you use psalms in the form of hymns, that is to say do you choose a hymn BECAUSE it is based on a psalm? (Please circle appropriate answer)

- a. Yes
b. No

6. Do you use a particular type of psalm - e.g. thanksgiving, lament, praise, plea? (Please circle appropriate answer/s)

- a. No
b. Yes thanksgiving
c. Yes praise
d. Yes lament
e. Yes plea

7. How big a range of Psalms do you use in your preaching generally? (please circle appropriate answer)

- a. 1-5 psalms
b. 6-10 psalms
c. 11-20 psalms
d. 21-30 psalms
e. 31-50 psalms
f. more than 50 psalms

8. When you use psalms, why do you use them? (please circle appropriate answer/s)

a. A psalm gives additional meaning to worship

b. They extend the service so I fill the hour

c. They express an emotion which reflects on the theme of the service

d. They express an emotion which reflects on the content of the prayers

e. They reflect a theme in current events

f. Other.....

.....

.....

9. If you don't use psalms, please could you explain why not? (Please circle appropriate answer/s)

a. Don't like responsive psalms in H&P

b. Language of the Psalms is too masculine

c. No good way of singing them

d. Don't want to read them to congregation

e. Only do a maximum of 2 readings—OT or Epistle and Gospel

f. Other

.....

11. What changes in use of psalms have you noticed during the course of your preaching career? (please circle appropriate answer/s)

a. Psalms used less often

b. Psalms used more often

c. Psalms sung more

d. Psalms said more

e. Any other changes (please explain)

.....

.....

12. Would you appreciate help in using psalms in worship? (please circle appropriate answer)

a. Yes (go to next question)

b. No (finish here)

13. What form of help would you appreciate in increasing your use of psalms in worship?

a. booklist with notes about each book

b. series of bible studies on Psalms

c. series of talks on different ways of using Psalms in worship

d. forum where each participant explains how they use Psalms in worship

e. other

.....

.....

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire. If you have any other relevant comments about the use of Psalms in worship, please write them on the back of this sheet.

Appendix 2
Results of Preacher Questionnaire

Q1. How long have you been preaching?

0-10years	4
11-20years	9
> 20years	13
no response	3
total	29

Q2. How often do you preach per quarter?

	0-10 years	11-20 years	> 20 years	no response	all
once					
twice	1	1	4	1	7
3-4 times	3	3	5		11
5-6 times		1	1		2
7-9 times		1			1
12-14 times					0
more than 15 times		3	2		5
In emergency			1		1
no response				2	2

Q3. Do you use the Psalms in leading worship in church?

frequency of preaching per quarter	yes	no	no response
once			
twice	7		
3-4times	10	1	
5-6 times	2		
7-9 times	1		
12-14 times			
> 15 times	5		
no response			2
in emergency	1		

length of service	yes	no	no response
0-10 years	4		
11-20 years	9		
20+ years	13	1	
no response			2

Q4. In what ways do you use Psalms within a service and how often?

Tables showing responses by frequency of preaching

frequency of preaching unknown				
	every service	1 service in 2	1 service in 3 to 8	< 1 service in 8
call to worship	1			
reading by congregation				1
reading by individual				1
responsive reading - individual + congregation	1			1
singing by congregation				2
singing by choir				2
introduction to adoration				2
introduction to confession				2
introduction to thanksgiving				2
introduction to supplication				2

preaching twice per quarter				
	every service	1 service in 2	1 service in 3 to 8	< 1 service in 8
call to worship	1		4	2
reading by congregation		1	1	4
reading by individual		1		5
responsive reading - individual + congregation			5	1
singing by congregation				5
singing by choir			1	4
introduction to adoration			4	2
introduction to confession			2	4
introduction to thanksgiving			5	1
introduction to supplication			1	5

preaching 3 or 4 times per quarter				
	every service	1 service in 2	1 service in 3 to 8	< 1 service in 8
call to worship	2	3	3	2
reading by congregation		1	2	6
reading by individual	1		3	4
responsive reading - individual + congregation		2	4	4
singing by congregation				9
singing by choir				6
introduction to adoration		2	1	6
introduction to confession		1	1	7
introduction to thanksgiving			1	6
introduction to supplication			3	4

nb 1 person did not respond to this question

preaching 5 or 6 times per quarter				
	every service	1 service in 2	1 service in 3 to 8	< 1 service in 8
call to worship		1	1	
reading by congregation			1	1
reading by individual				2
responsive reading - individual + congregation		1	1	
singing by congregation				1
singing by choir				1
introduction to adoration			2	
introduction to confession			1	
introduction to thanksgiving			1	
introduction to supplication			1	

preaching 7 to 9 times per quarter				
	every service	1 service in 2	1 service in 3 to 8	< 1 service in 8
call to worship			1	
reading by congregation				
reading by individual				
responsive reading - individual + congregation			1	
singing by congregation				
singing by choir				
introduction to adoration				
introduction to confession				1
introduction to thanksgiving				
introduction to supplication				

preaching more than 15 times per quarter				
	every service	1 service in 2	1 service in 3 to 8	< 1 service in 8
call to worship		1	1	3
reading by congregation			3	1
reading by individual			1	2
responsive reading - individual + congregation		2	3	
singing by congregation				1
singing by choir				3
introduction to adoration		2	1	1
introduction to confession				2
introduction to thanksgiving				2
introduction to supplication				2

preaching-in emergency				
	every service	1 service in 2	1 service in 3 to 8	< 1 service in 8
call to worship -		1		
reading by congregation		1		
reading by individual				1
responsive reading - individual + congregation		1		
singing by congregation				1
singing by choir				1
introduction to adoration			1	
introduction to confession			1	
introduction to thanksgiving				1
introduction to supplication				

all				
	every service	1 service in 2	1 service in 3 to 8	< 1 service in 8
call to worship	4	6	10	7
reading by congregation	0	3	7	13
reading by individual	1	1	4	15
responsive reading - individual + congregation	1	6	14	6
singing by congregation	0	0	0	19
singing by choir	0	0	1	17
introduction to adoration	0	4	9	11
introduction to confession	0	1	5	16
introduction to thanksgiving	0	0	7	12
introduction to supplication	0	0	5	13

Tables showing responses by length of service

unknown length of service				
	every service	1 service in 2	1 service in 3 to 8	< 1 service in 8
call to worship	1		1	
reading by congregation				2
reading by individual				2
responsive reading-individual + congregation	1		1	1
singing by congregation				3
singing by choir				3
introduction to adoration			1	2
introduction to confession				3
introduction to thanksgiving			1	2
introduction to supplication				3
other (please specify).....				

0-10y				
	every service	1 service in 2	1 service in 3 to 8	< 1 service in 8
call to worship		2	2	
reading by congregation			1	3
reading by individual			1	3
responsive reading-individual + congregation			2	2
singing by congregation				4
singing by choir				3
introduction to adoration			2	2
introduction to confession			1	3
introduction to thanksgiving			2	2
introduction to supplication			1	3
other (please specify).....				

11-20y				
	every service	1 service in 2	1 service in 3 to 8	< 1 service in 8
call to worship		3	3	3
reading by congregation			5	3
reading by individual	1		1	4
responsive reading-individual + congregation		1	7	1
singing by congregation				4
singing by choir				5
introduction to adoration		1	3	3
introduction to confession		1	1	5
introduction to thanksgiving			1	4
introduction to supplication			1	4
other (please specify).....				

more than 20y				
	every service	1 service in 2	1 service in 3 to 8	< 1 service in 8
call to worship	3	1	4	4
reading by congregation		3	1	5
reading by individual		1	2	6
responsive reading-individual + congregation		5	4	2
singing by congregation				8
singing by choir			1	6
intro adoration prayers		3	3	4
introduction to confession			3	5
introduction to thanksgiving			3	4
introduction to supplication			3	3
other (please specify).....				

nb 1 no response to this question

Q5. Do you use psalms in the form of hymns, that is to say do you choose a hymn BECAUSE it is based on a psalm?

frequency of preaching			
	yes	no	no response
once			
twice	3	4	
3-4times	5	5	1
5-6 times	1	1	
7-9 times		1	
12-14 times			
> 15 times	2	3	
other	1		
no response	1	1	
	13	15	1

length of service			
	yes	no	no response
0-10 years	3	1	
11-20 years	3	6	
> 20 years	6	6	1
no response	1	2	

Q6. Do you use a particular type of psalm – e.g. thanksgiving, lament, praise plea?

frequency of preaching						
	no	yes-thanks	yes-praise	yes-lament	yes-plea	no response
once						
twice	1	5	5	3	1	
3-4times	2	7	7	3	1	1
5-6 times	1	1	1			
7-9 times	1					
12-14 times						
other		1	1		1	
> 15 times	2	3	2	1	1	
no response	2					

length of service						
	no	yes-thanks	yes-praise	yes-lament	yes-plea	no response
0-10 years	1	3	3	1	1	
11-20 years	4	4	4	2		
> 20 years	2	9	8	4	3	1
no response	2	1	1			

Q7. How big a range of psalms do you use in your preaching generally?

	0-10 years	11-20 years	> 20 years	no response	all
1-5 psalms	1	3	2	1	7
6-10 psalms	1	1	1		3
11-20 psalms		3	4		7
21-30 psalms				1	1
31-50 psalms		1	2		3
more than 50 psalms	2	1			3
no response			4	1	5

Q8. When you use psalms, why do you use them?

	no response	0-10 years	11-20 years	more than 20 years	all
adds meaning	1	2	7	7	17
extends service					0
relates to theme of service	3	3	8	8	22
relates to content of prayers		2	2	5	9
reflects current events		2	3	5	10
other		1	2	4	7
no response				2	2

Q9. If you don't use psalms, please could you explain why not?

	no response	0-10 years	11-20 years	more than 20 years
dislike H&P		1	1	
language too masc				
can't sing				
don't want to read				
only 2 readings				
other	1		2	1

Q10. (I misnumbered the questions and there wasn't a Q10!)

Q11. What changes in use of psalms have you noticed during the course of your preaching career?

	no response	0-10 years	11-20 years	more than 20 years	all
less often		3	5	6	14
more often	1		1	4	6
sung more					0
said more		1		3	4
other			3	5	8
no change	2		1		3
no response				2	2

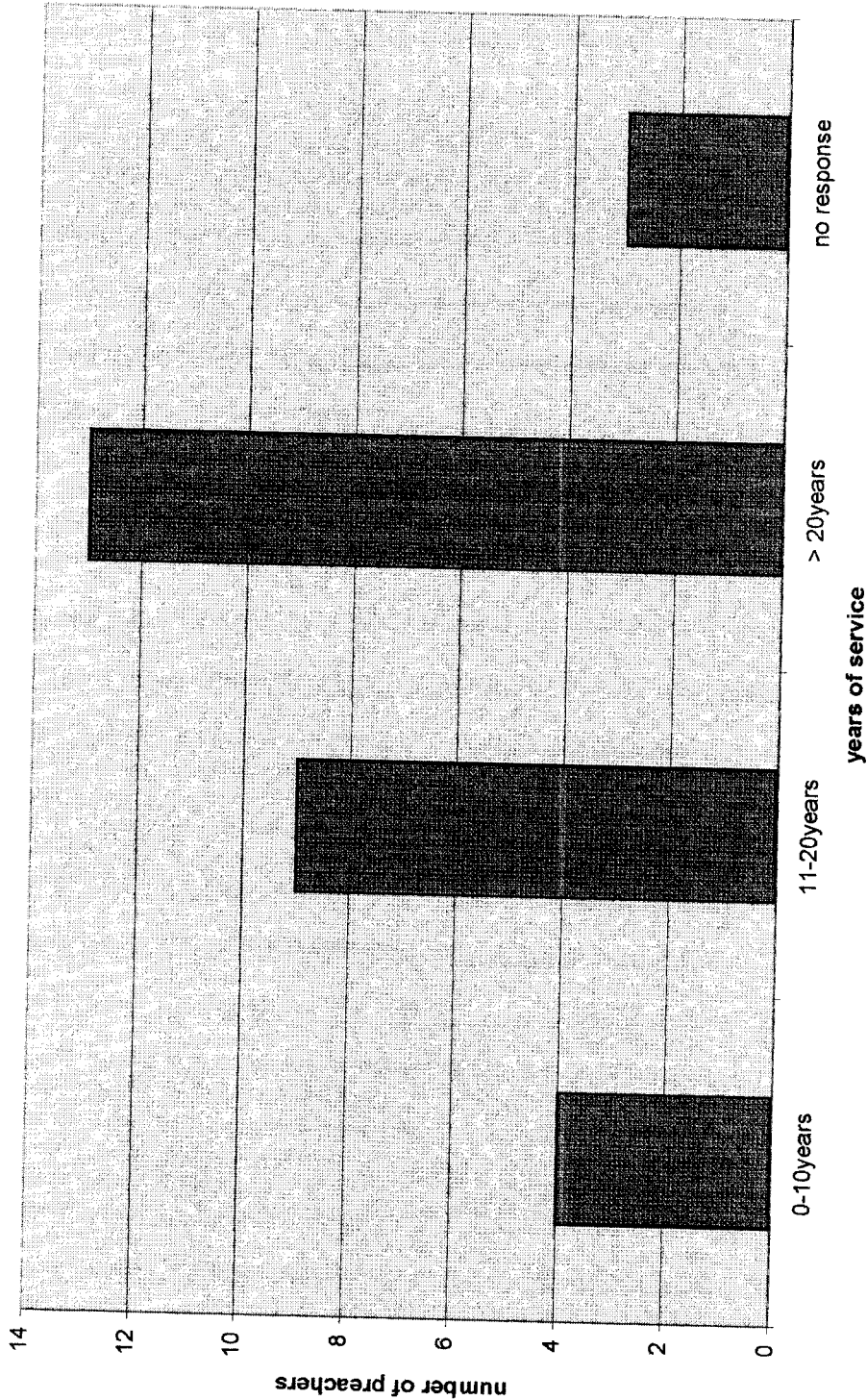
Q12. Would you appreciate help in using psalms in worship?

	no response	0-10 years	11-20 years	more than 20 years	all
yes	1	2	6	6	15
no	2	1	3	6	12
no response		1		2	3

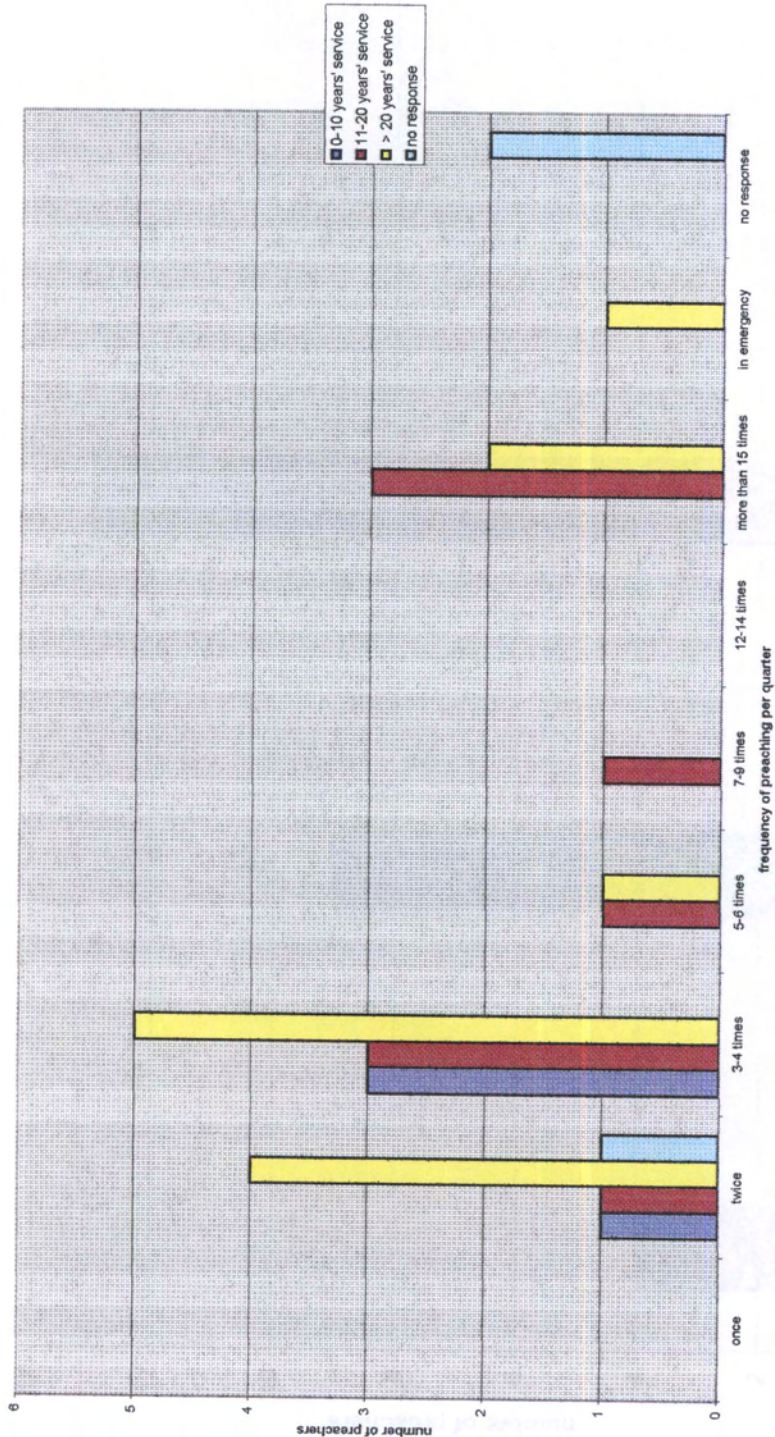
Q13. What form of help would you appreciate in increasing your use of psalms in worship?

	no response	0-10 years	11-20 years	more than 20 years	all
booklist				1	1
bible studies	1		4	5	10
talks	2	1	5	4	12
forum		2	2	3	7
other		1		1	2

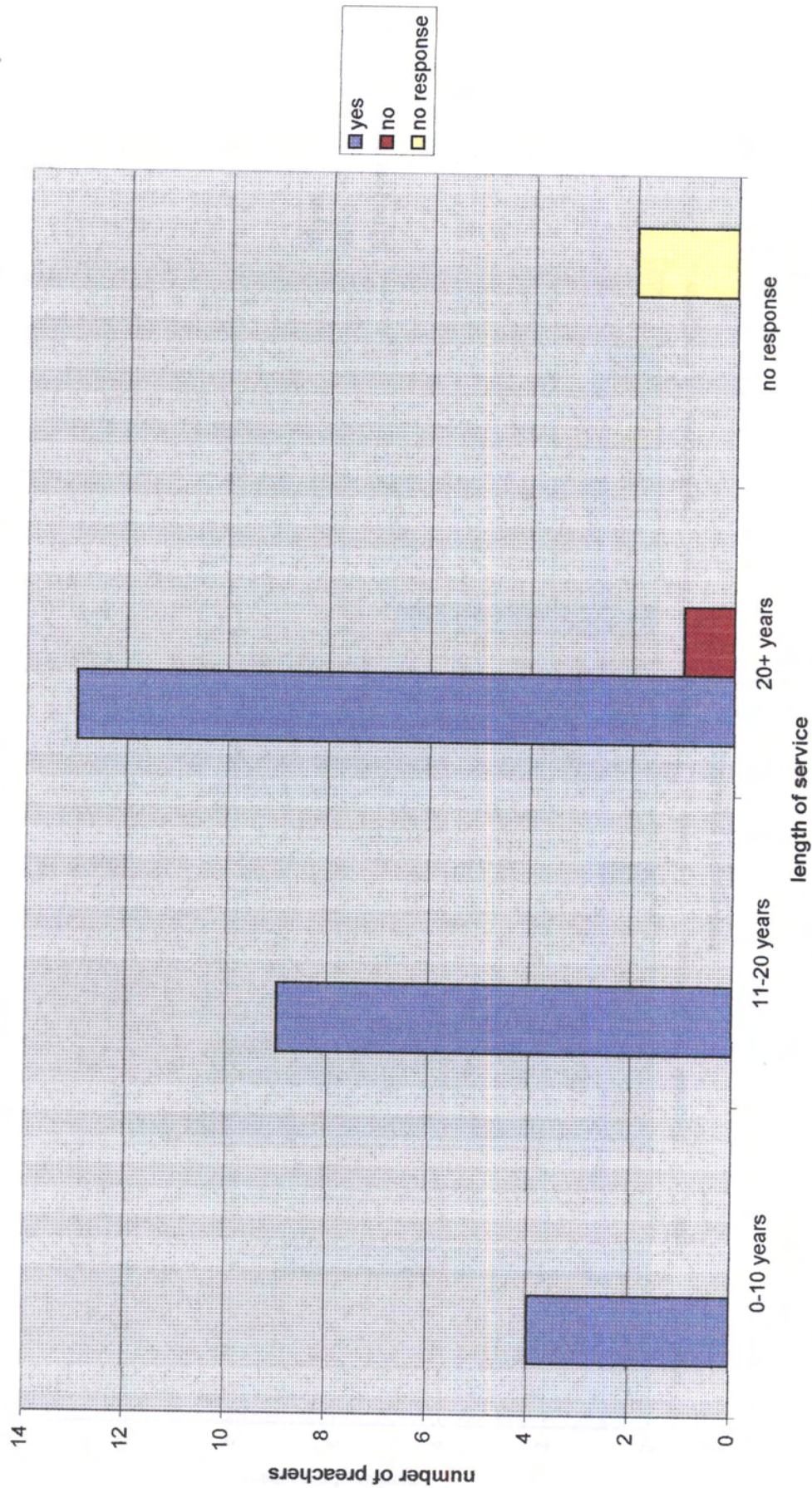
Q1 How long have you been preaching?



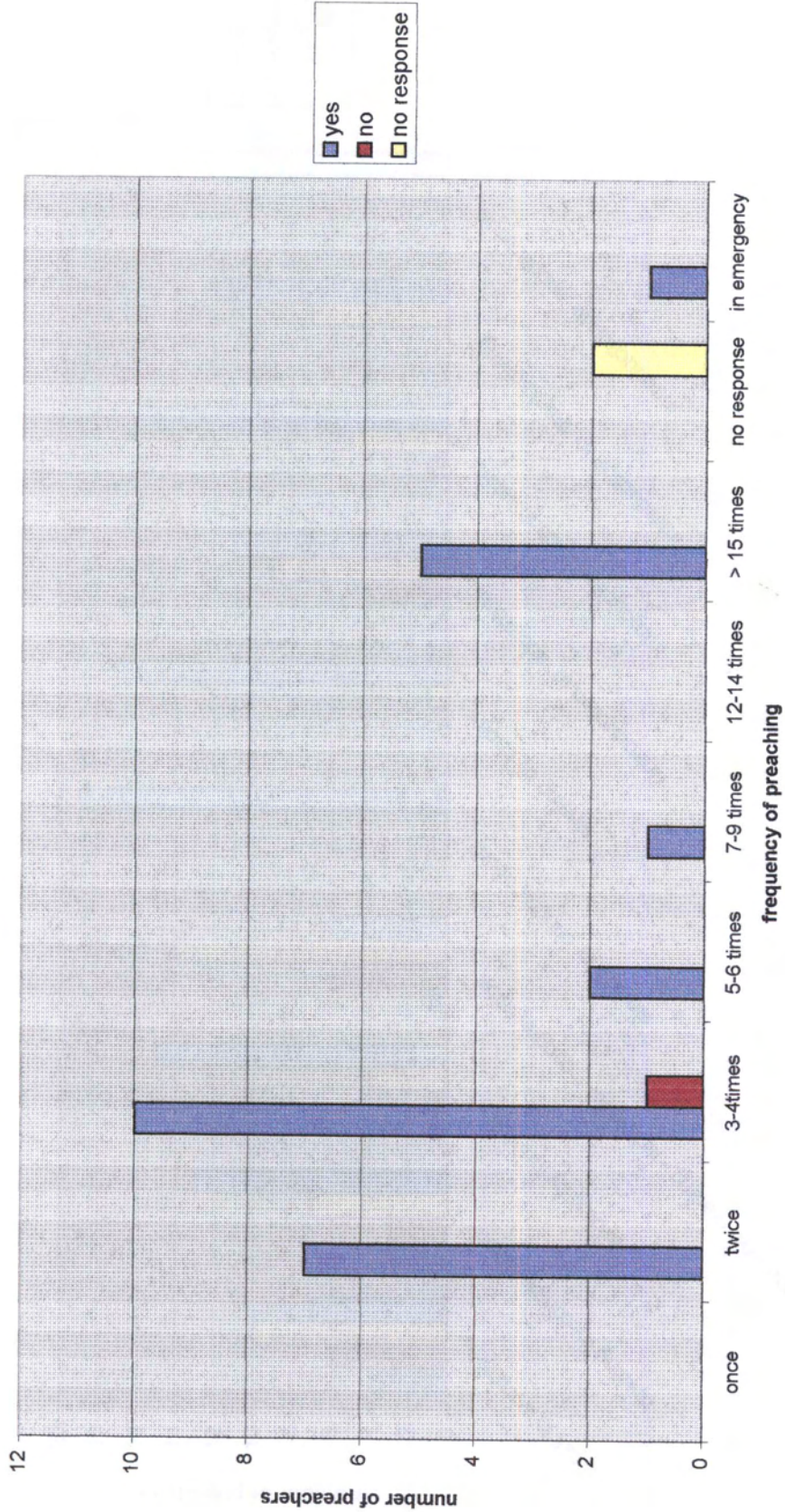
Q2 How often do you preach per quarter?



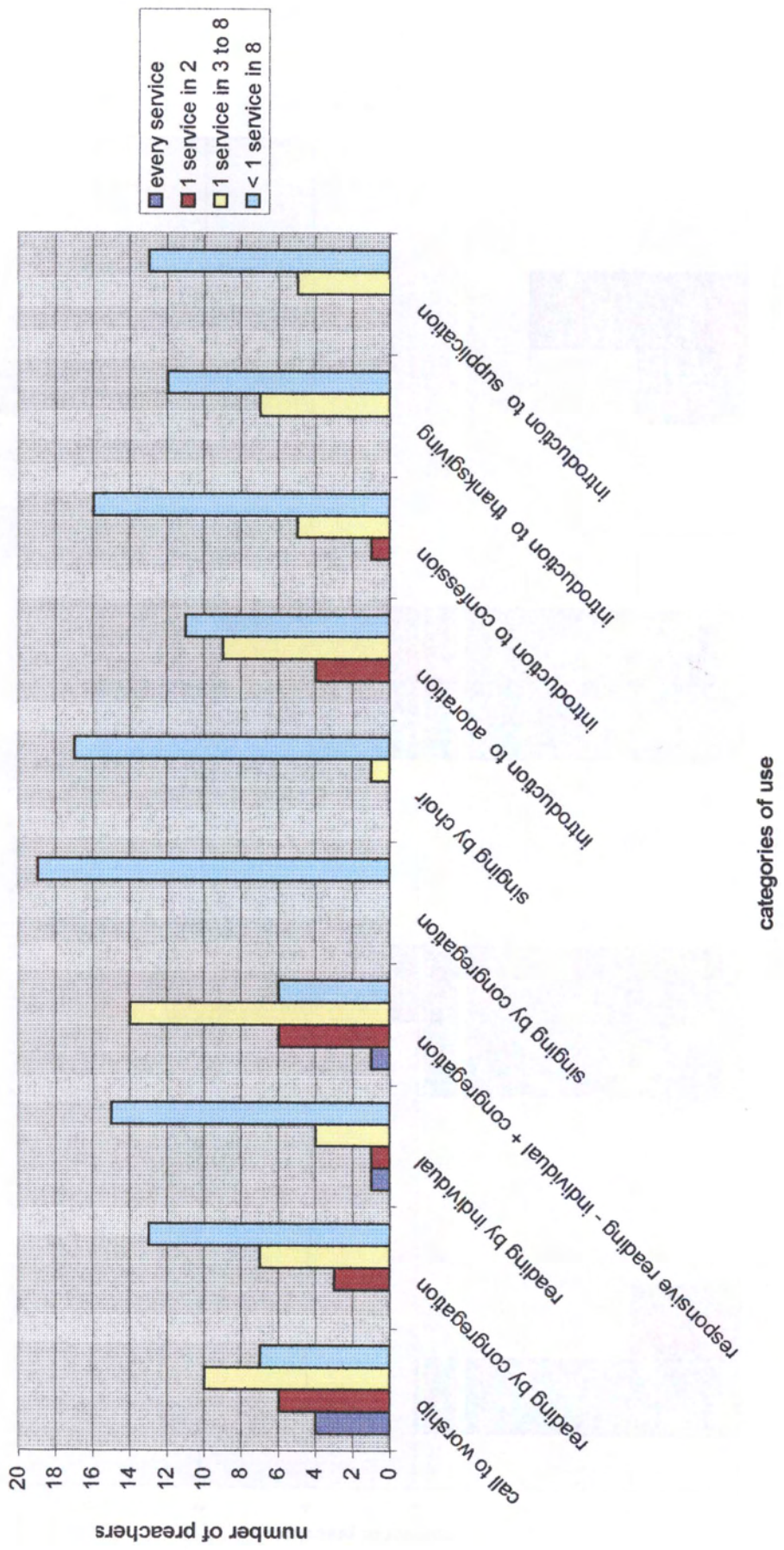
Q3 Do you use the Psalms in leading worship in church?



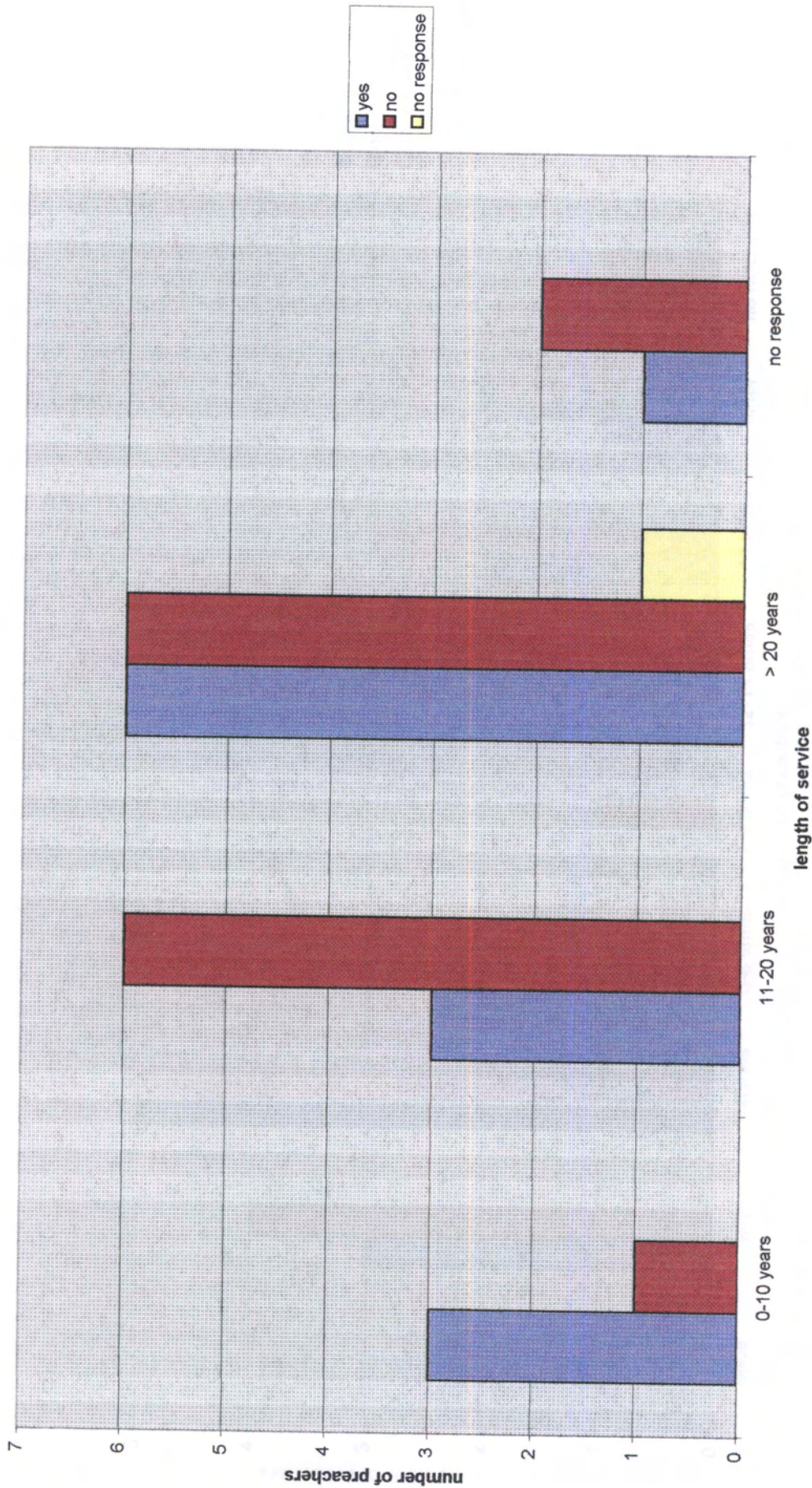
Q3 Do you use the Psalms in leading worship in church?



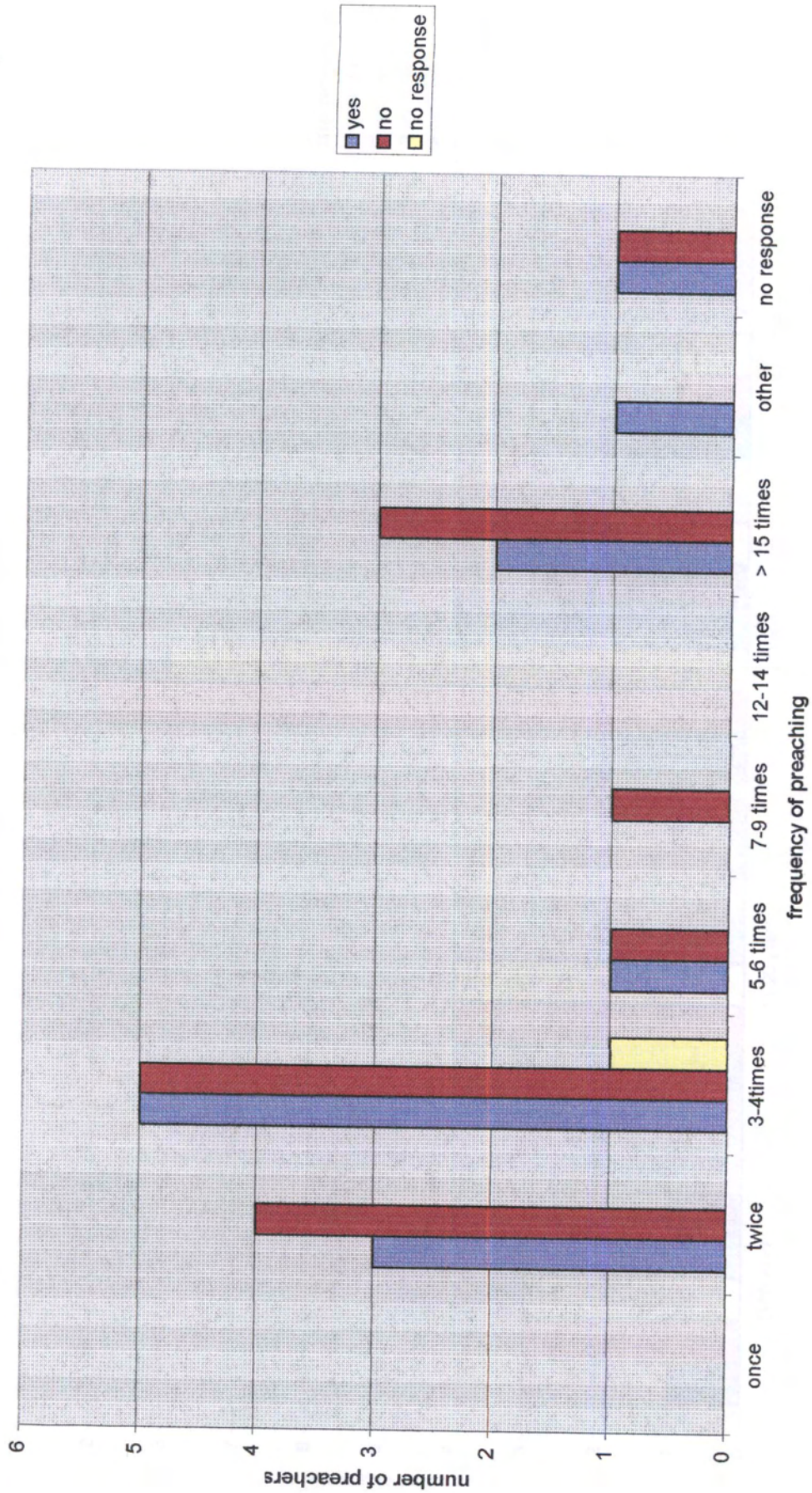
Q4 - uses of Psalms



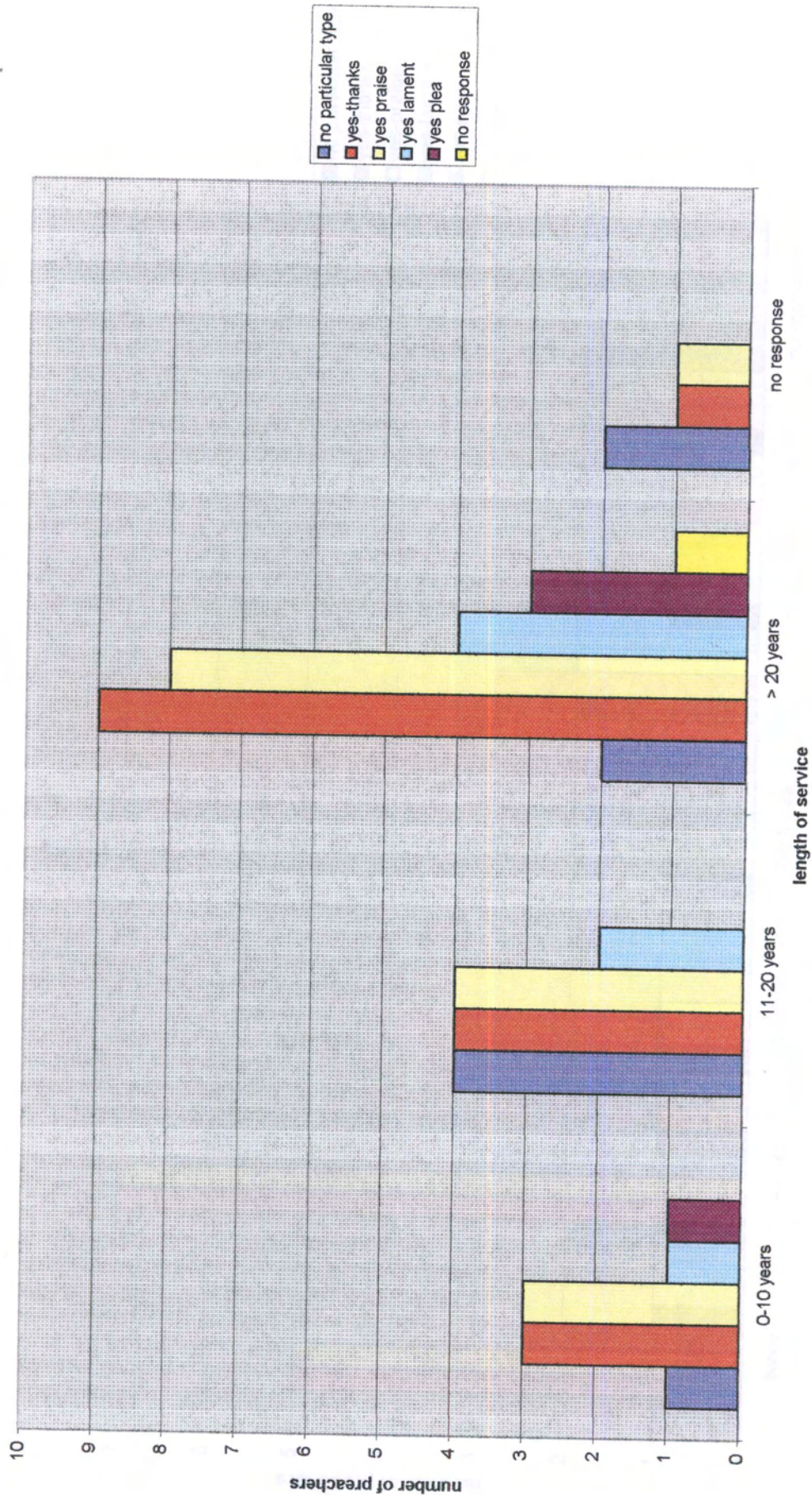
Q5 Do you use Psalms as hymns?



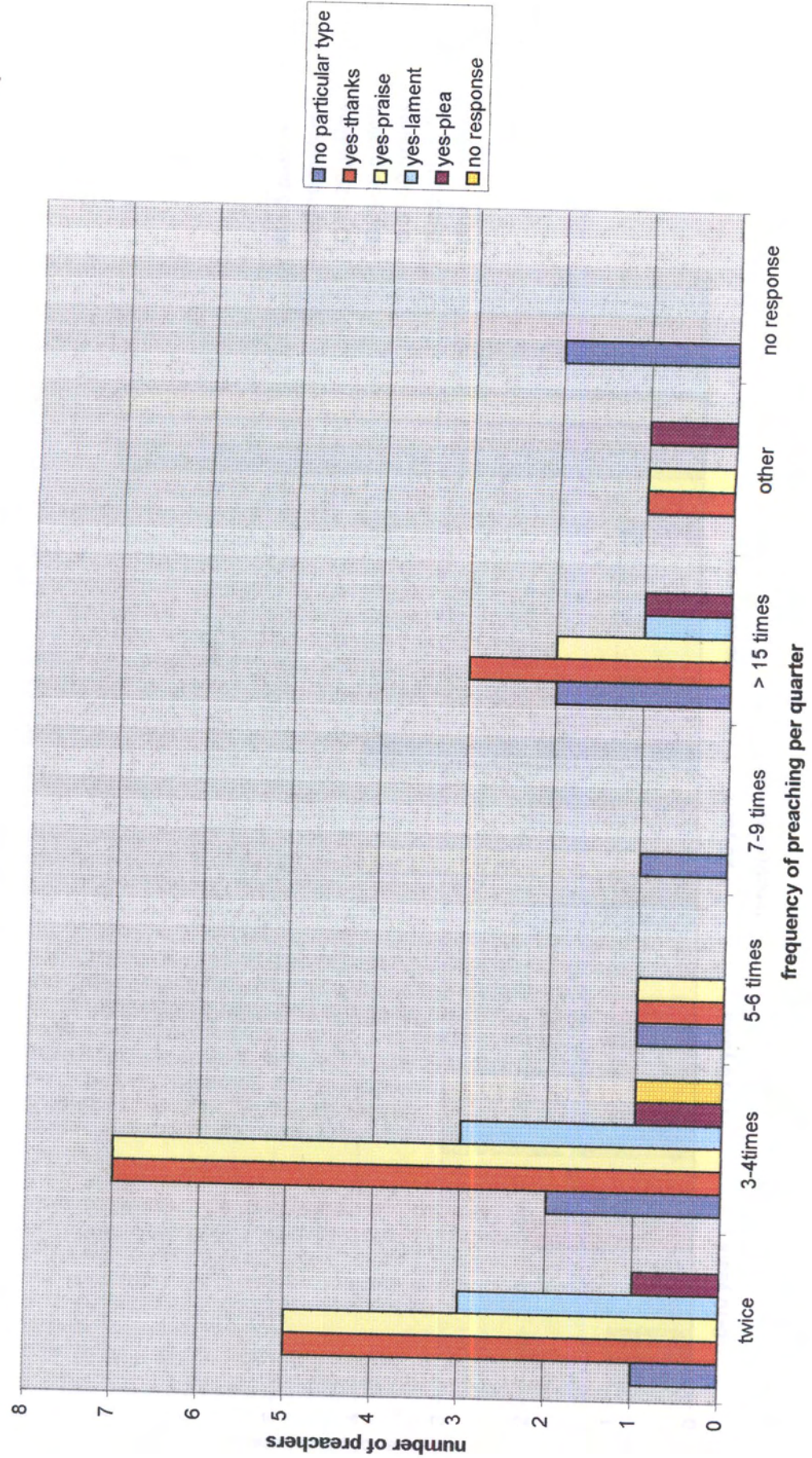
Q5 Do you use Psalms in the form of hymns?



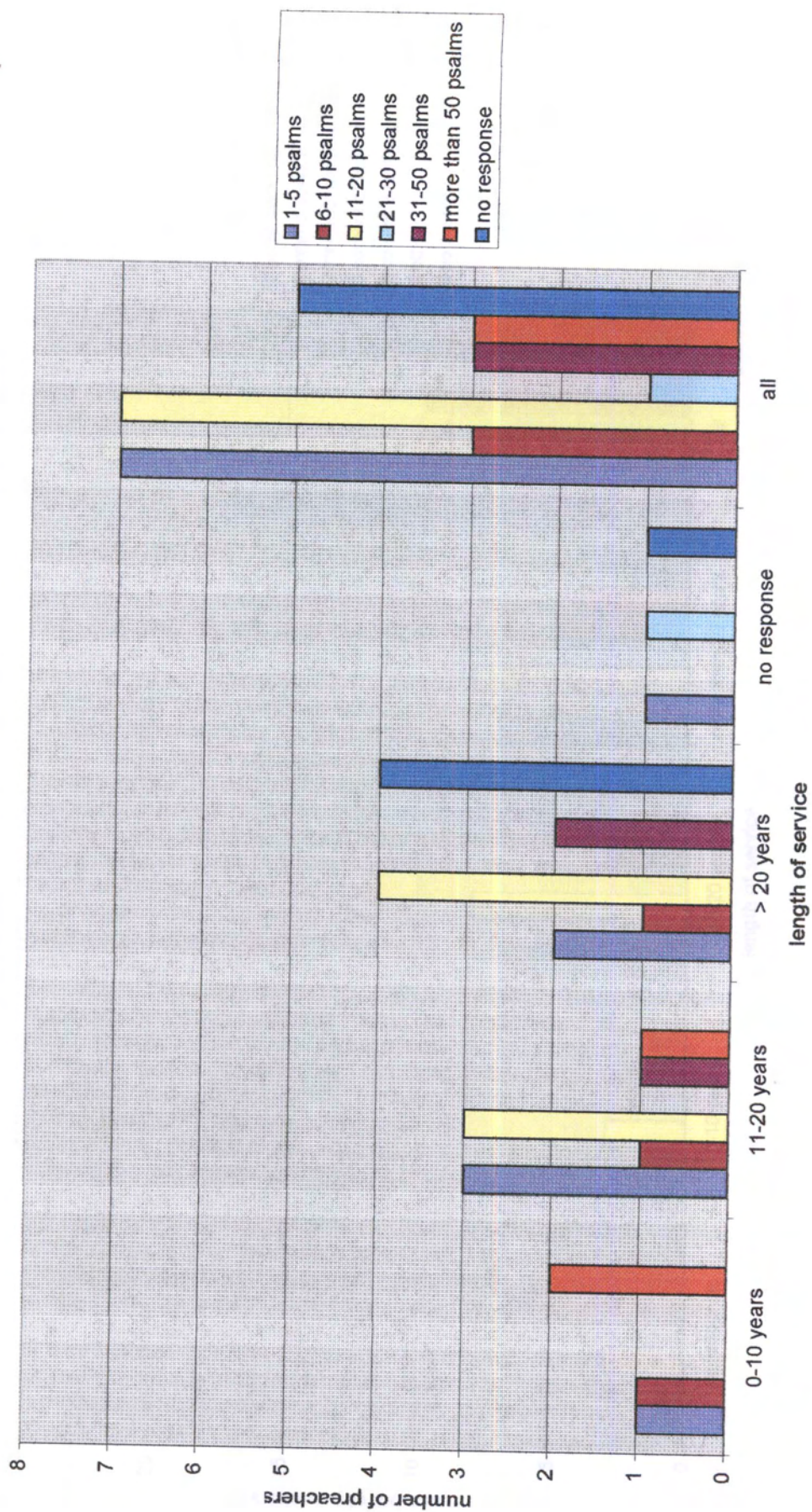
Q6 Do you use particular types of Psalms?



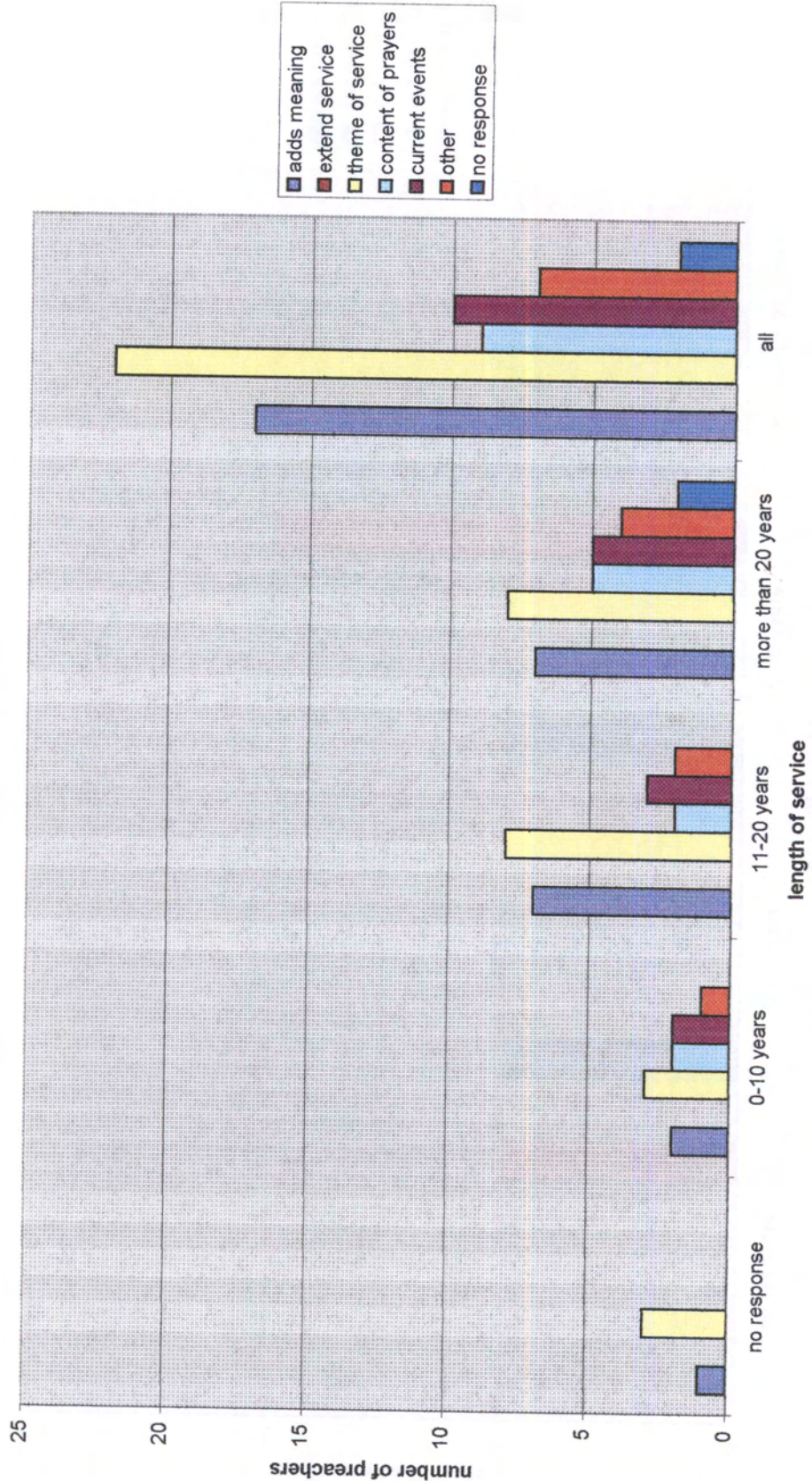
Q6 Do you use particular types of Psalms?



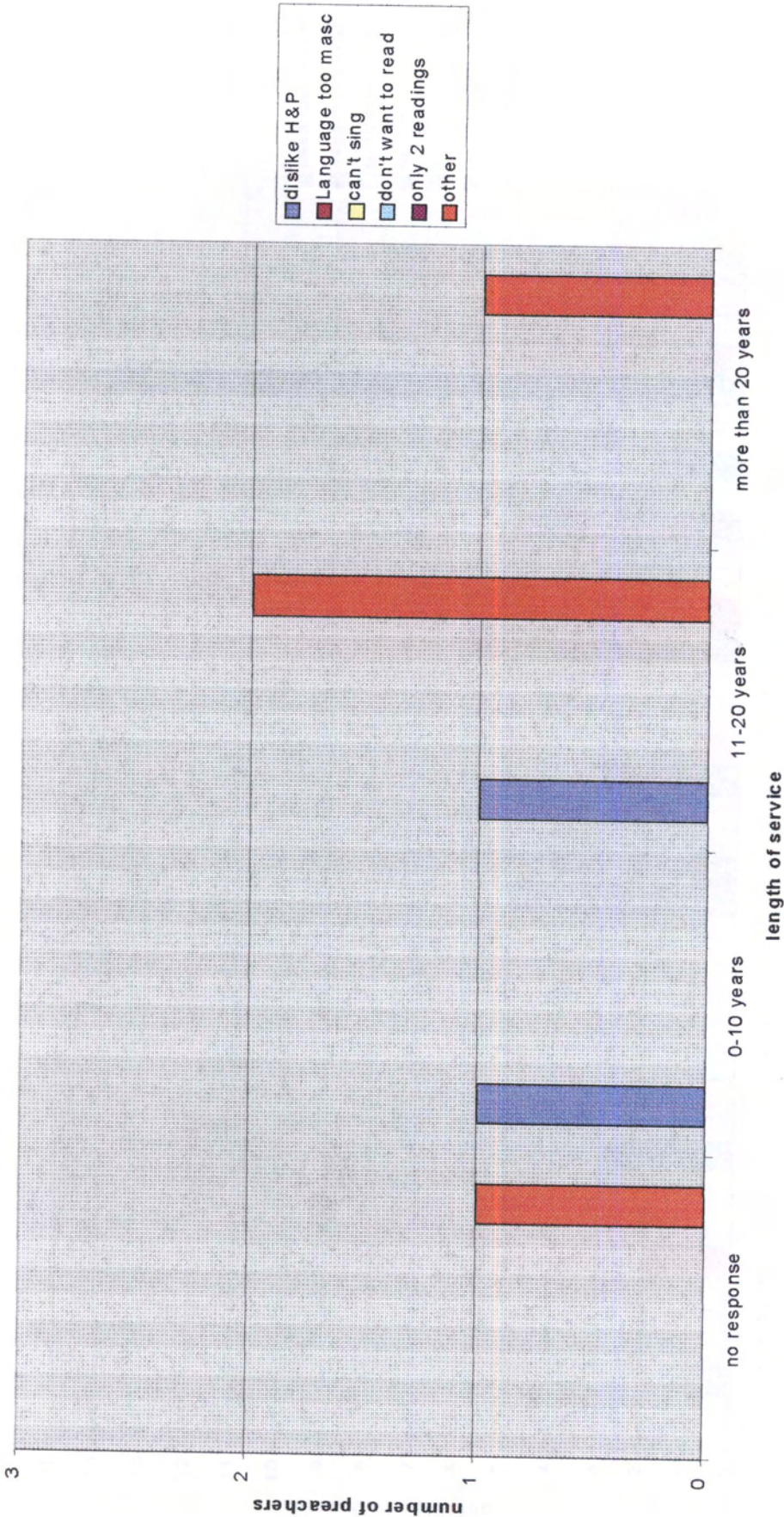
Q7 How big a range of Psalms do you use in your preaching generally?



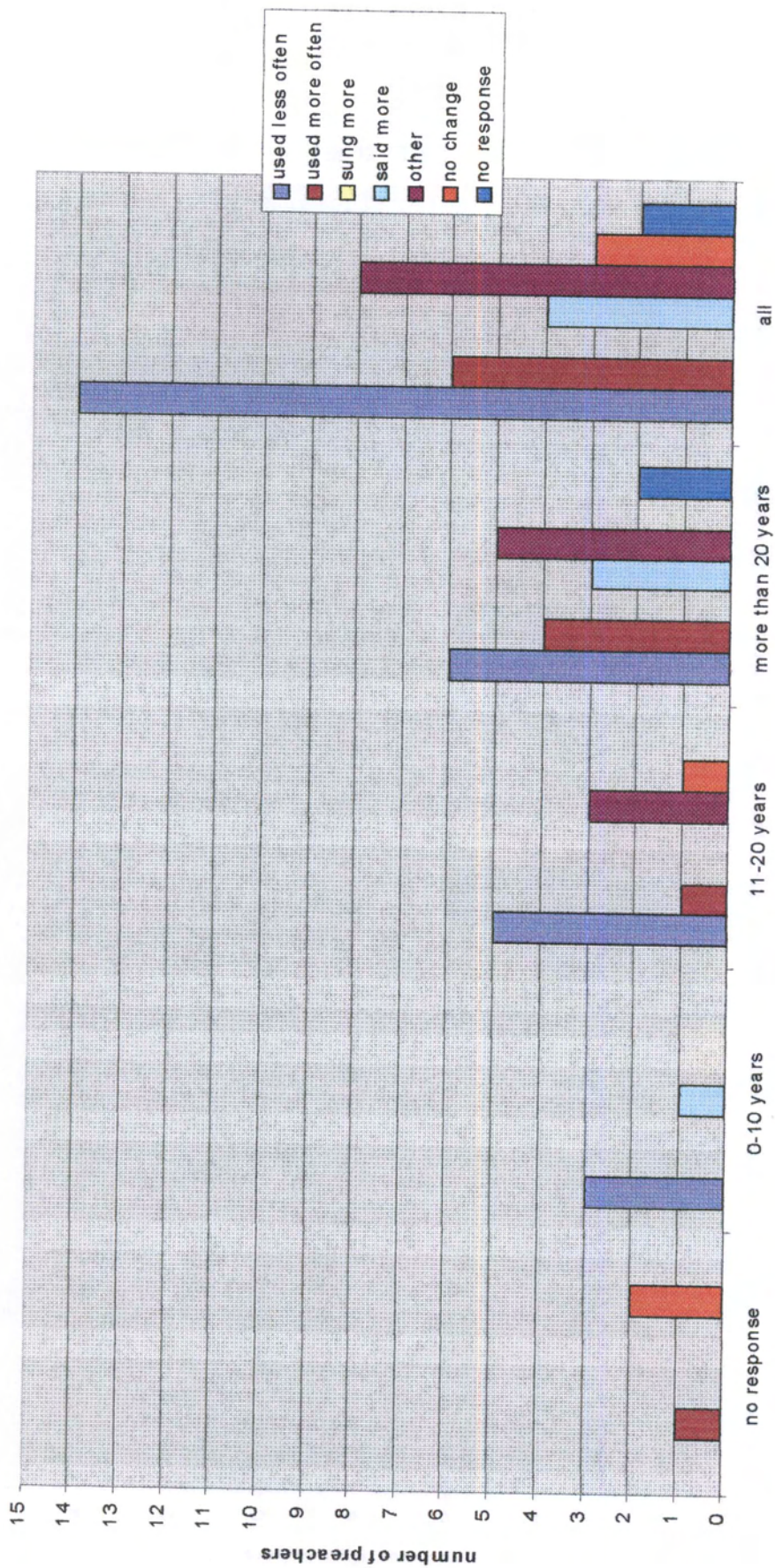
Q8 When you use Psalms, why do you use them?



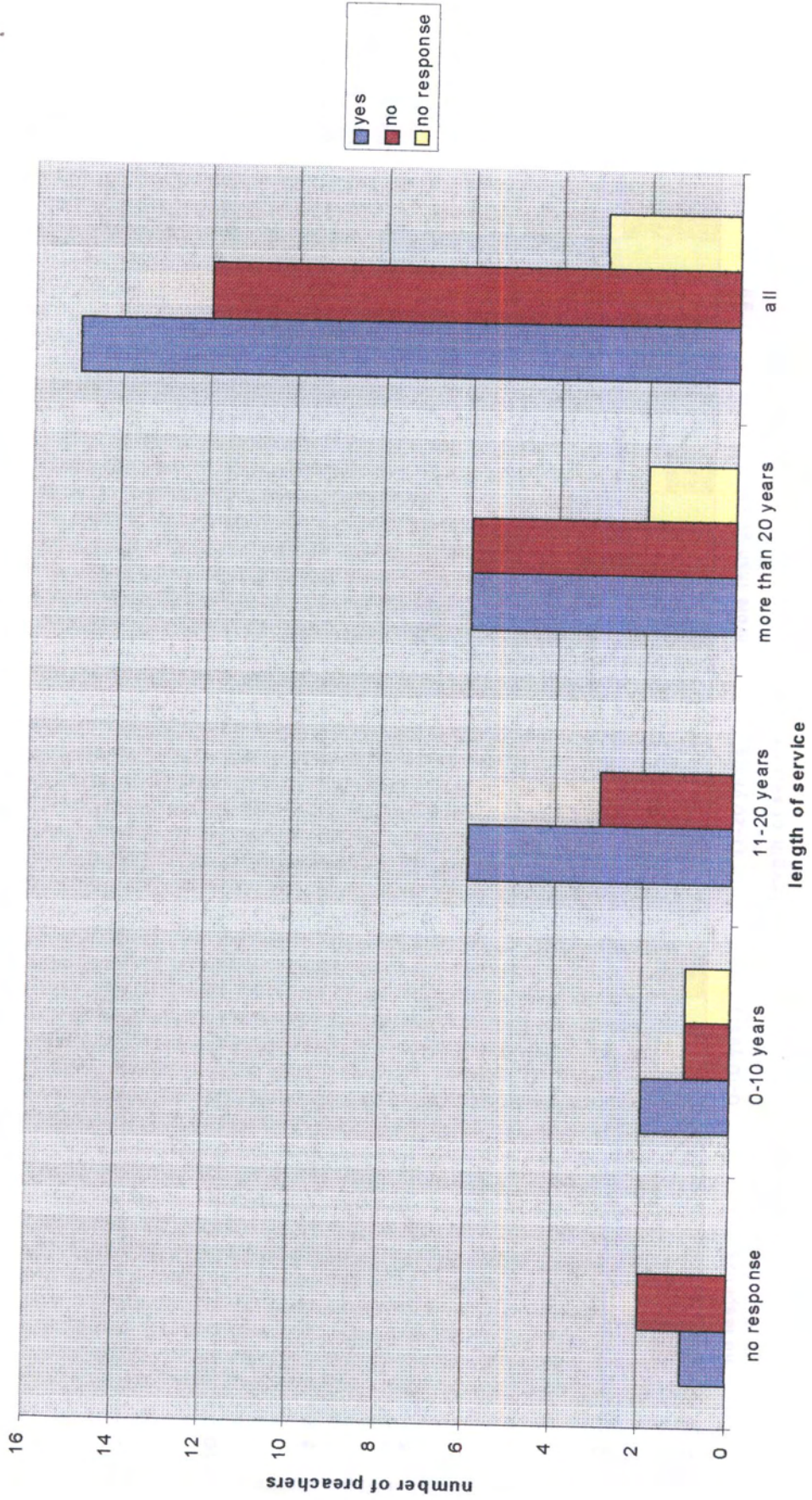
Q9 If you don't use Psalms, please could you explain why not?



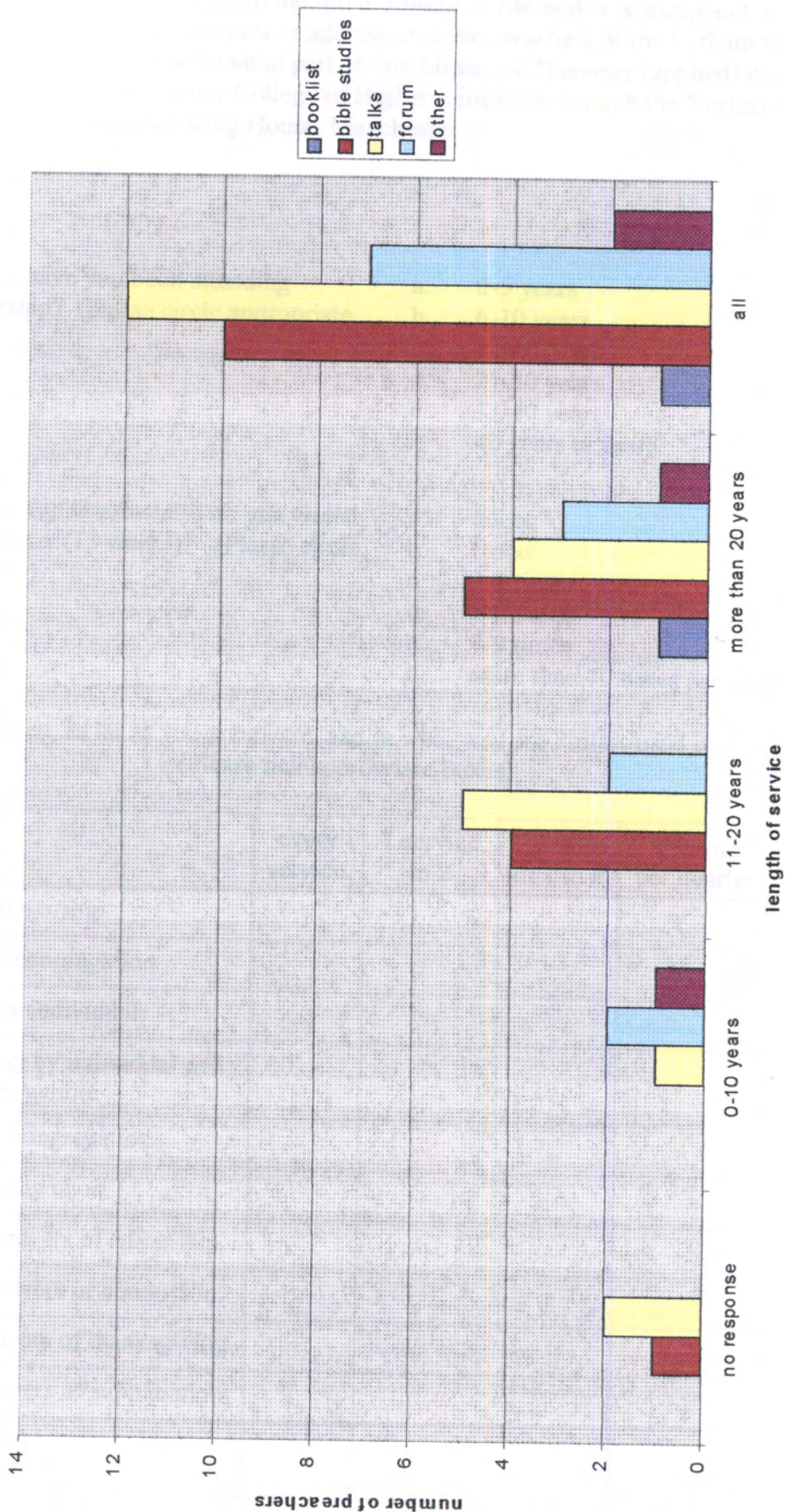
Q11 What changes in the use of Psalms have you noticed during the course of your preaching career?



Q12 Would you appreciate help in using the Psalms in worship?



Q13 What form of help would you appreciate in increasing your use of Psalms in worship?



Appendix 3 Congregational Questionnaire

This questionnaire is intended to establish what use is made of the Psalms in worship. It will contribute to a thesis looking into the use of Psalms in Methodist worship and will be complemented by a similar questionnaire addressed to the preachers of the Lytham St Annes Circuit. The thesis forms a substantial part of my Master of Theology (applied) degree which I am undertaking at Chester College of Higher Education through the Northern Ordination Course based in Luther King House, Manchester.

1. How long have you been attending Methodist worship? (please circle appropriate letter)
 - a. 0-5 years
 - b. 6-10 years
 - c. 11-20 years
 - d. 21-30 years
 - e. 31-40 years
 - f. 40 years or more

2. How often (approximately) do you attend worship per quarter (13 weeks)? (Please circle appropriate letter)
 - a. once
 - b. twice
 - c. 3-4 times
 - d. 5-6 times
 - e. 7-9 times
 - f. more than 10 times per quarter

3. How often, as far as you are aware, and in what way are Psalms used in worship? (Please tick appropriate boxes)

	every service	1 service in 2	1 service in 3 to 8	1 service per quarter	never
call to worship					
reading by congregation					
reading by individual					
responsive reading by individual and congregation					
singing by congregation					
singing by choir					
introduction to prayers of adoration					
introduction to prayers of confession					
introduction to prayers of thanksgiving					
introduction to prayers of supplication					
other (please specify).....					
.....					

4. Are you aware of singing psalms in the form of hymns? (please circle appropriate letter)

a. Yes

b. No
5. When psalms are used in worship, is a particular type of psalm used? (please circle appropriate letter/s)

a. No

b. Yes - thanksgiving

c. Yes - lament

d. Yes - praise

e. Yes - plea

f. don't know
6. Do you often hear the same psalm in worship? (please circle appropriate letter)

a. No

b. Yes
7. Do you like there to be a psalm in Sunday worship? (please circle appropriate letter)

a. No

b. Yes

c. no opinion
8. "As an individual, the Psalms are very important to me." (please circle appropriate letter)

a. Agree strongly (go to question 9)

b. Agree (go to question 9)

c. Neither agree nor disagree

d. Disagree (go to question 10)

e. Disagree strongly (go to question 10)
9. If you agreed in any way with question 8, please circle the letter of as many reasons as seem appropriate. Then go to question 11, overleaf.

a. Psalms express my emotions to God

b. Psalms are helpful when praying

c. Psalms are helpful when life is difficult

d. Psalms help me to express my anger

e. Psalms help me to express my grief

f. Psalms help me to offer praise

g. Psalms cheer me up

h. Other (please explain)

.....

.....

.....
10. If you disagreed in any way with question 8, please circle the letter of as many reasons as seem appropriate. Then go to question 11, overleaf.

a. Psalms are boring

b. Psalms are not Christian

c. Psalms are too full of anger

d. Psalms are too full of hatred

e. I don't know much about the Psalms

f. Other (please explain).....

.....

.....

.....

.....

11. What changes in the use of psalms have you noticed since you FIRST started worshipping in a Methodist church? (please circle appropriate letter/s)

a. No change in the use of Psalms

b. Psalms are used less often

c. Psalms are used more often

d. Psalms are read rather than sung

e. Psalms are sung rather than read

f. Any other change (please explain)

.....

.....

.....

.....

12. If you have noticed a change, is this an improvement? Please try to give a reason for your answer.

Yes, because.....

.....

.....

.....

No, because.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire. If you have any further comments to make about Psalms in worship, please write them in the space below.

Appendix 4

Results of Congregational Questionnaire

Q1. How long have you been attending Methodist worship?

0-5 years	30
6-10 years	24
11-20 years	33
21-30 years	28
31-40 years	39
> 40 years	179
	333

Q2. How often (approximately) do you attend worship per quarter (13 weeks)?

	0-5y	6-10y	11-20y	21-30y	31-40y	> 40 y	all
once per quarter	1	0	2	1	0	1	5
twice per quarter	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
3-4 times per quarter	3	0	3	0	2	3	11
5-6 times per quarter	1	4	2	0	2	6	15
7-9 times per quarter	11	9	9	8	5	19	61
> 10 times per quarter	11	13	17	18	30	148	237
no response	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	28	26	33	28	39	179	333

Q3. How often, as far as you are aware, and in what way are Psalms used in worship?

	every service	1 service in 2	1 service in 3-8	1 service per quarter	never
call to worship	33	27	89	59	36
reading by congregation	25	13	85	94	37
reading by individual	33	23	73	82	29
responsive reading - congregation/individual	9	9	93	99	25
singing by congregation	39	13	41	66	89
singing by choir	38	13	45	47	42
intro to prayers of adoration	24	20	41	63	64
intro to prayers of confession	18	15	33	63	76
intro to prayers of thanksgiving	28	20	35	69	67
intro to prayers of supplication	19	13	22	63	80
other	2	1	3	0	0

Q4. Are you aware of singing Psalms in the form of hymns?

	yes	no	no response
once per quarter	3	1	0
twice per quarter	3	1	0
3-4 times per quarter	9	2	0
5-6 times per quarter	13	2	0
7-9 times per quarter	46	12	3
> 10 times per quarter	199	31	8
all	273	49	11

Q5. When psalms are used in worship, is a particular type of psalm used?

	once	twice	3-4 services	5-6 services	7-9 services	> 10 services	all
no	0	1	1	2	6	29	39
yes-thanksgiving	3	2	3	2	11	73	94
yes-lament	0	1	1	0	1	14	17
yes-praise	2	2	3	4	20	105	136
yes-plea	0	1	1	2	2	20	26
don't know	0	0	4	6	22	59	91
no response	1	0	0	0	7	25	33

Q6. Do you often hear the same psalm in worship?

	once	twice	3-4 services	5-6 services	7-9 services	> 10 services	all
yes	3	3	4	6	23	91	130
no	1	1	5	8	32	131	178
no response	0	0	2	1	6	15	25

Q7. Do you like there to be a psalm in Sunday worship?

	0-5 y	6-10y	11-20y	21-30y	31-40y	> 40y	all
yes	18	15	17	20	18	107	195
no	3	3	2	2	4	5	19
no opinion	9	6	8	13	17	66	119

Q8. 'As an individual, the Psalms are very important to me.'

	0-5y	6-10y	11-20y	21-30y	31-40y	> 40y	all
agree strongly	5	3	5	4	2	27	46
agree	12	8	5	7	13	62	107
neither	10	12	20	15	19	77	153
disagree	1	1	1	0	1	3	7
disagree strongly	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
no response	0	2	2	1	3	10	18
	28	26	33	28	39	179	333

Q9. If you agreed in any way with question 8, please circle the letter of as many reasons as seem appropriate.

	0-5y	6-10y	11-20y	21-30y	31-40y	> 40y	all
express emotions to God	9	5	6	11	6	42	79
helpful for prayer	9	7	9	7	8	60	100
helpful when life is difficult	12	8	8	8	12	58	106
help to express anger	4	2	2	1	0	9	18
help to express grief	6	2	2	3	0	20	33
help to offer praise	12	7	11	12	10	73	125
cheer me up	10	4	5	5	3	31	58
other	4	0	2	3	1	5	15

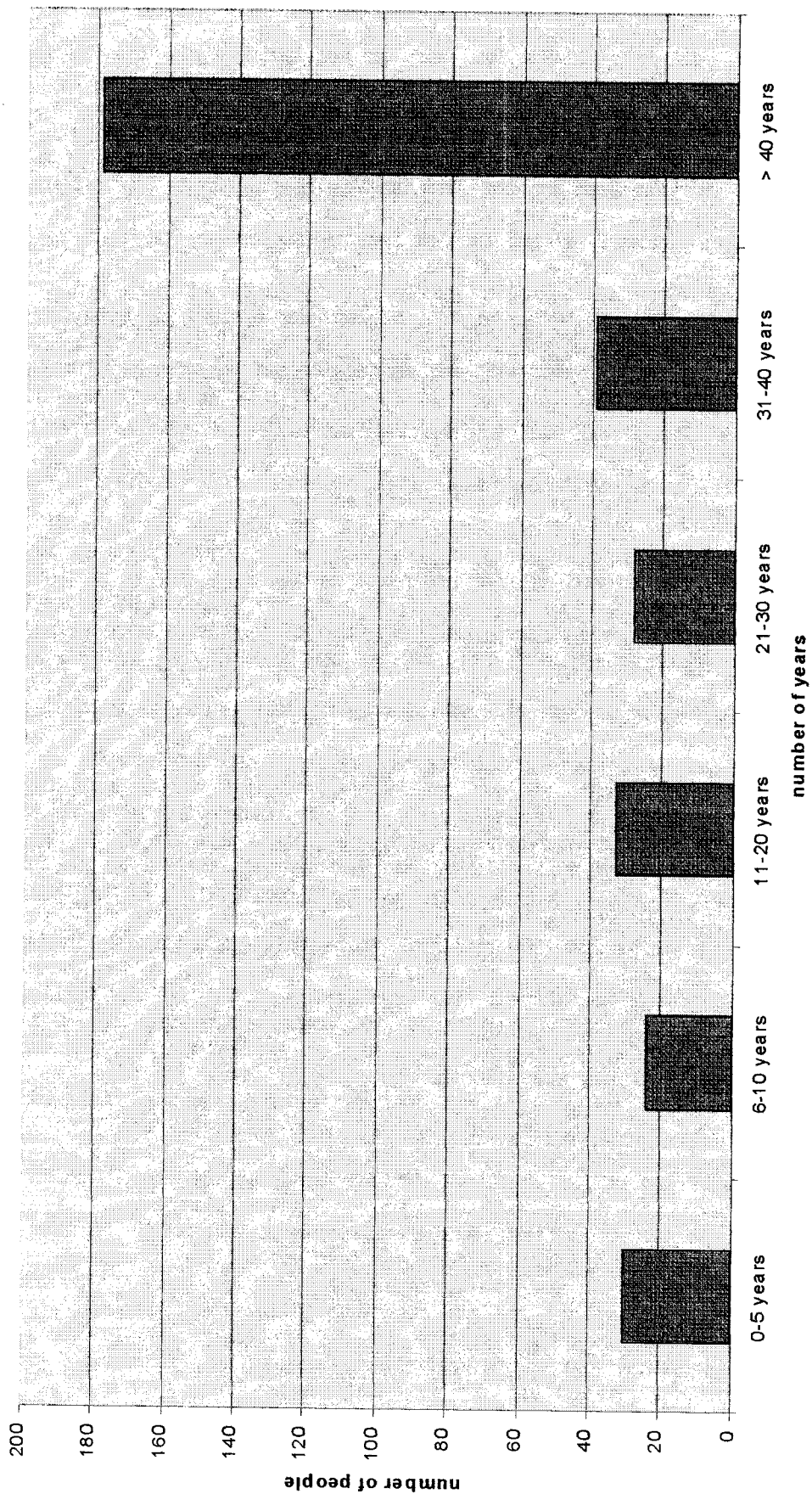
Q10. If you disagreed in any way with question 8, please circle the letter of as many reasons as seem appropriate.

0-5y	6-10y	11-20y	21-30y	31-40y	> 40y	all
0	0	0	1	0	0	1
0	0	0	0	2	0	2
0	0	0	0	1	1	2
0	0	0	0	2	1	3
4	4	5	4	4	21	42
0	3	1	0	2	2	8

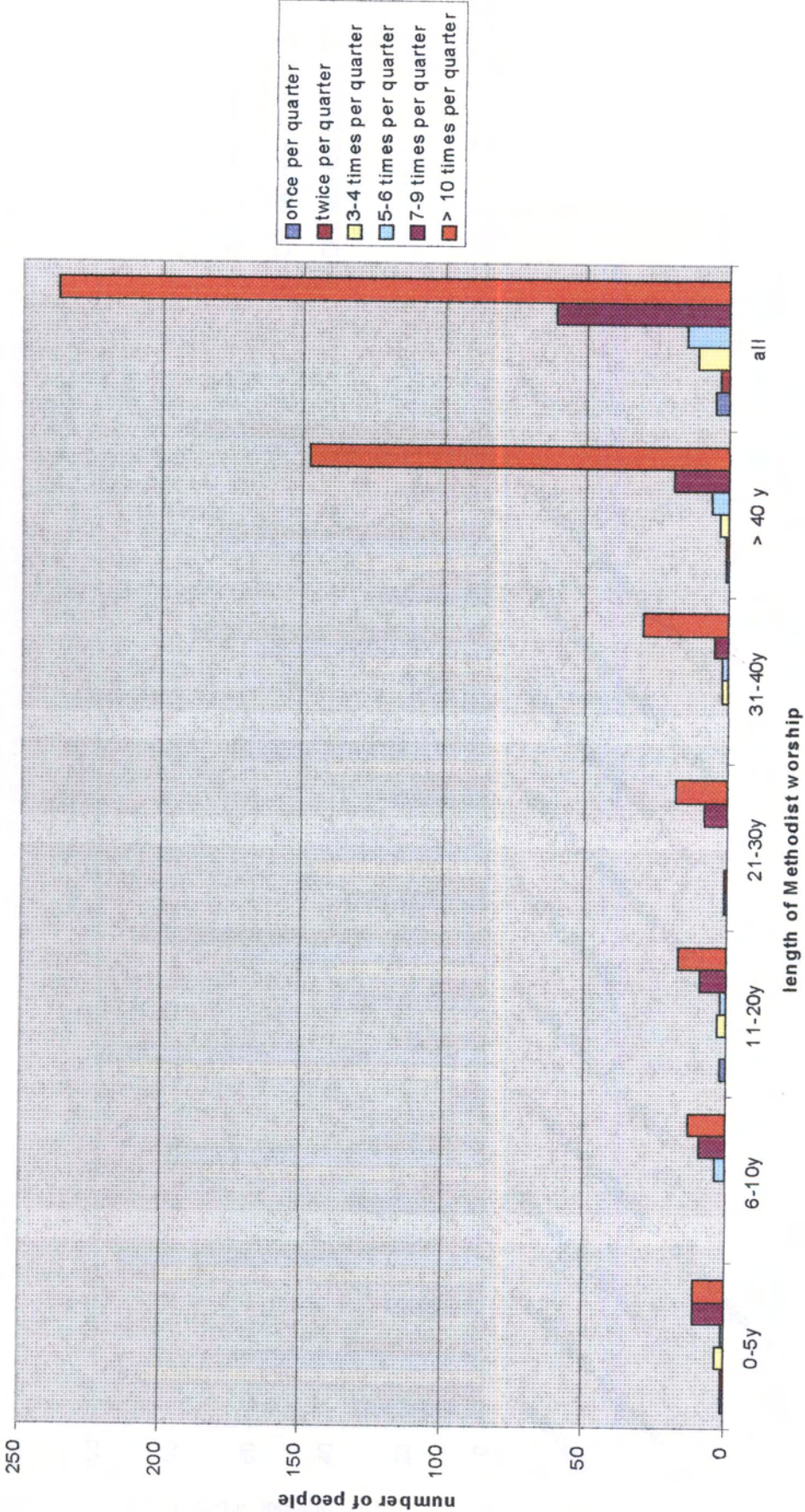
Q11. What changes in the use of psalms have you noticed since you first started worshipping in a Methodist church?

	0-5y	6-10y	11-20y	21-30y	31-40y	> 40y	all
no change	14	13	9	9	13	39	97
less often	4	8	6	10	10	73	111
more often	0	0	4	2	2	21	29
read rather than sung	4	5	9	6	9	54	87
sung rather than read	1	1	2	2	2	12	20
other	1	0	1	0	0	1	2

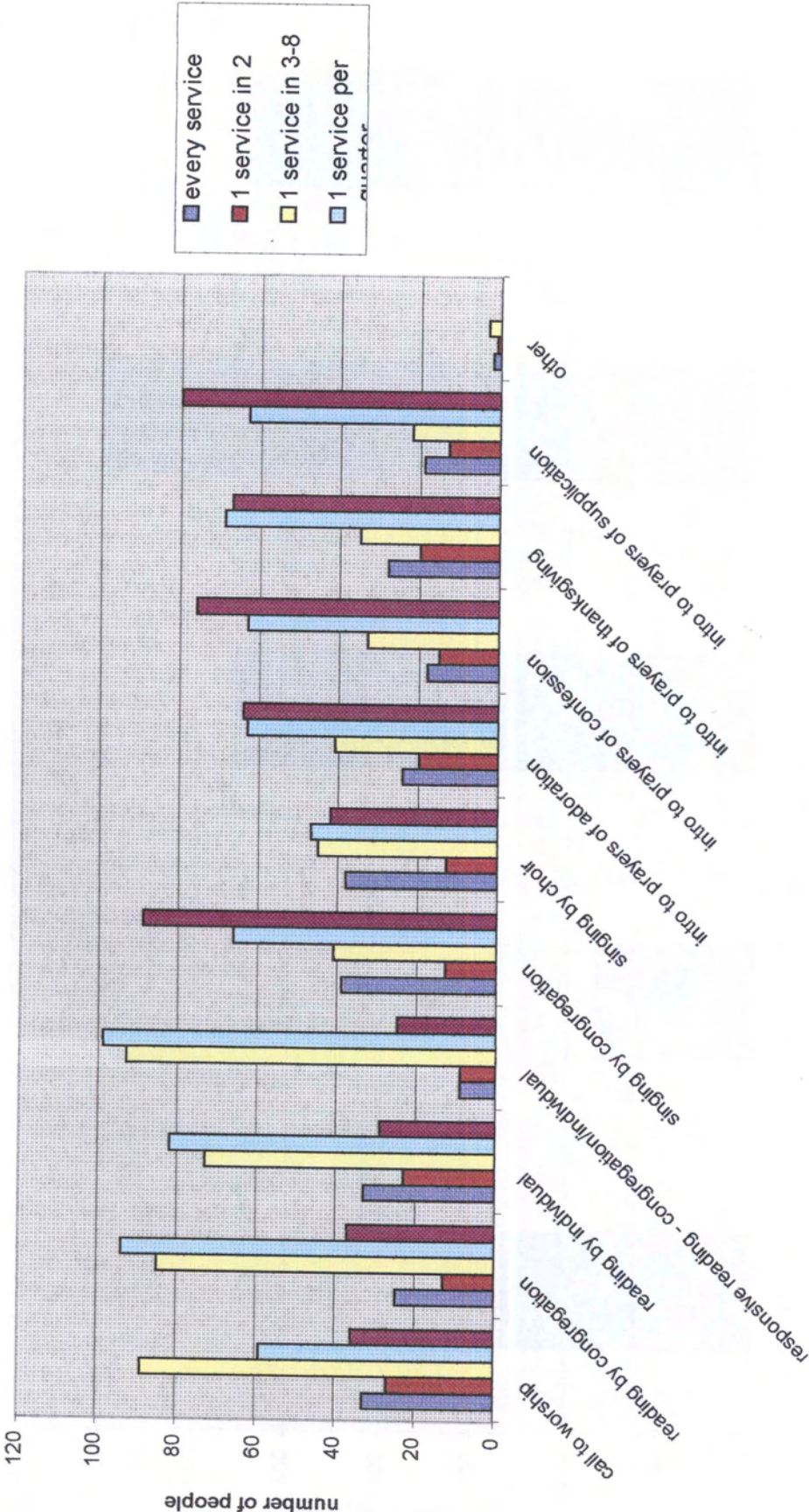
Q1 - How long have you been attending Methodist worship?



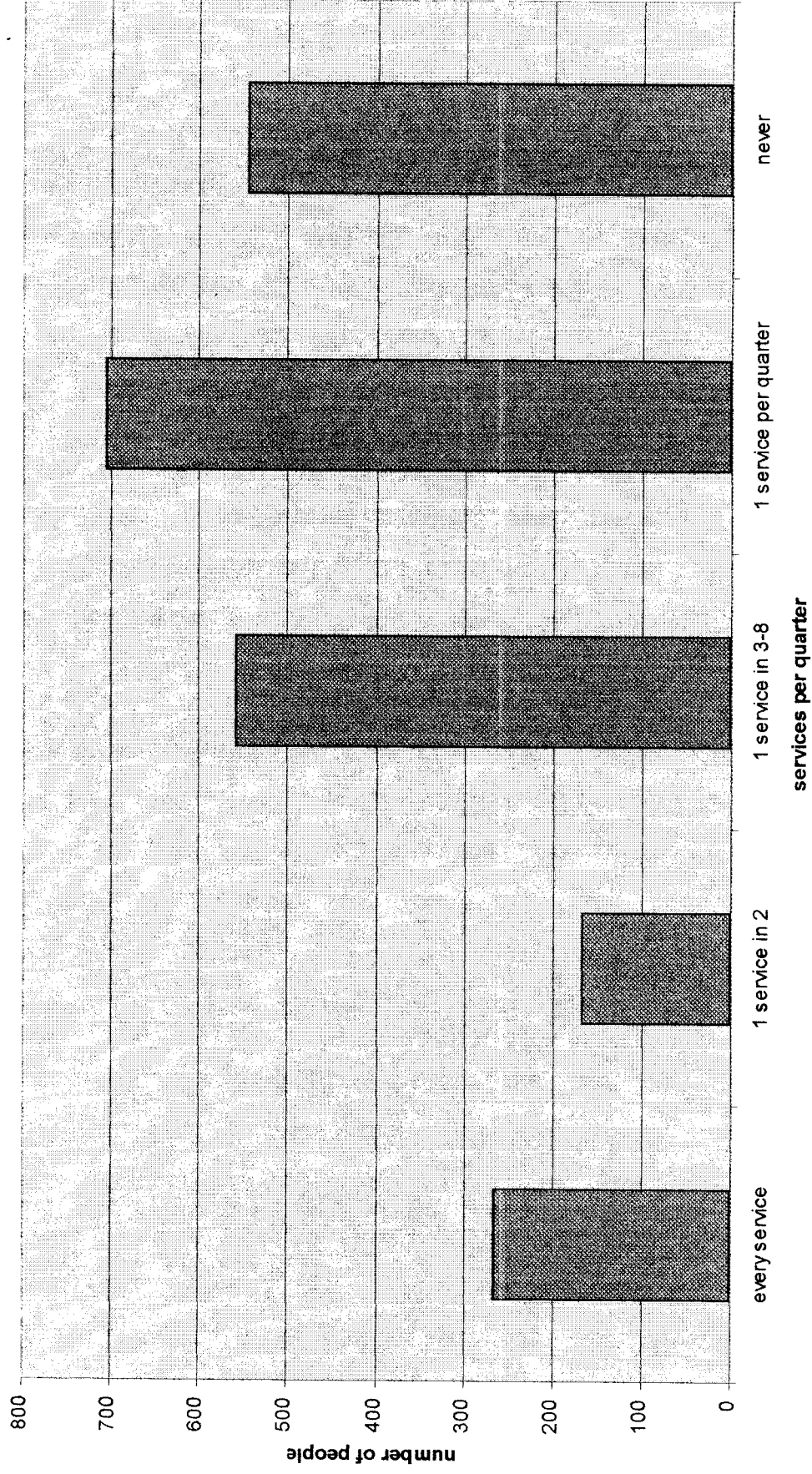
Q2 - How often (approximately) do you attend worship per quarter (13 weeks)?



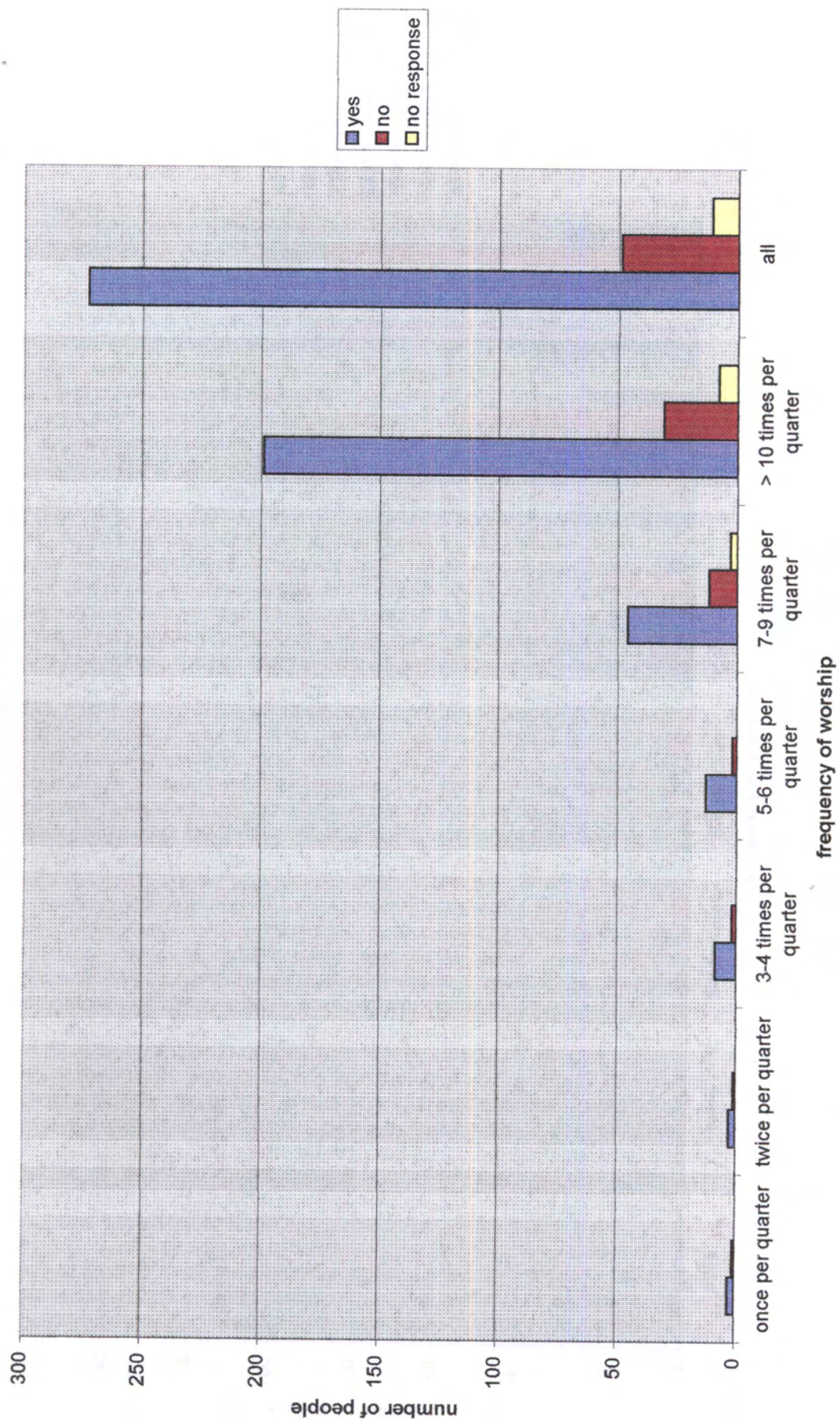
Q3 - Congregational perception of use of Psalms



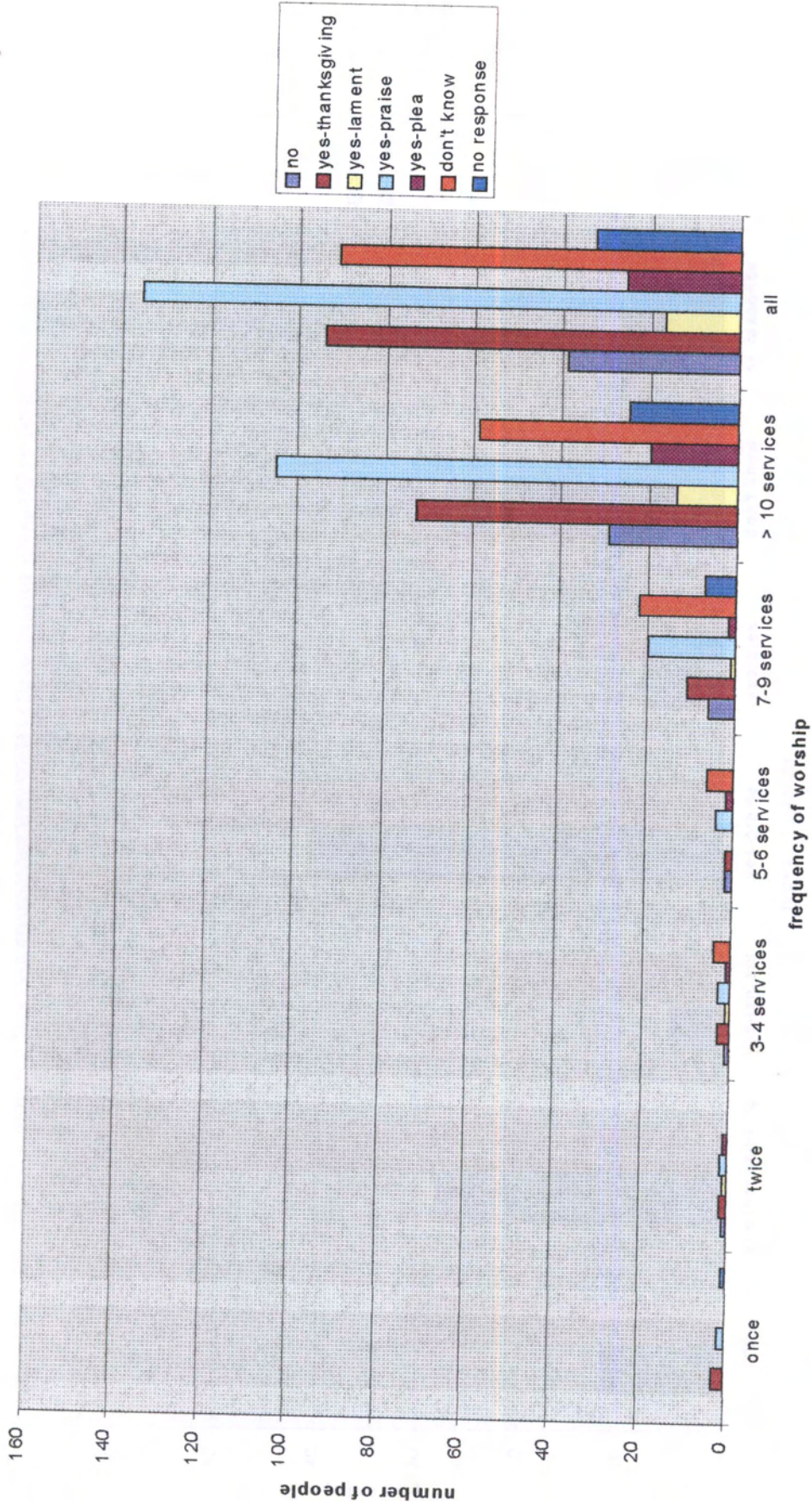
Q3 Frequency of use for all categories of use



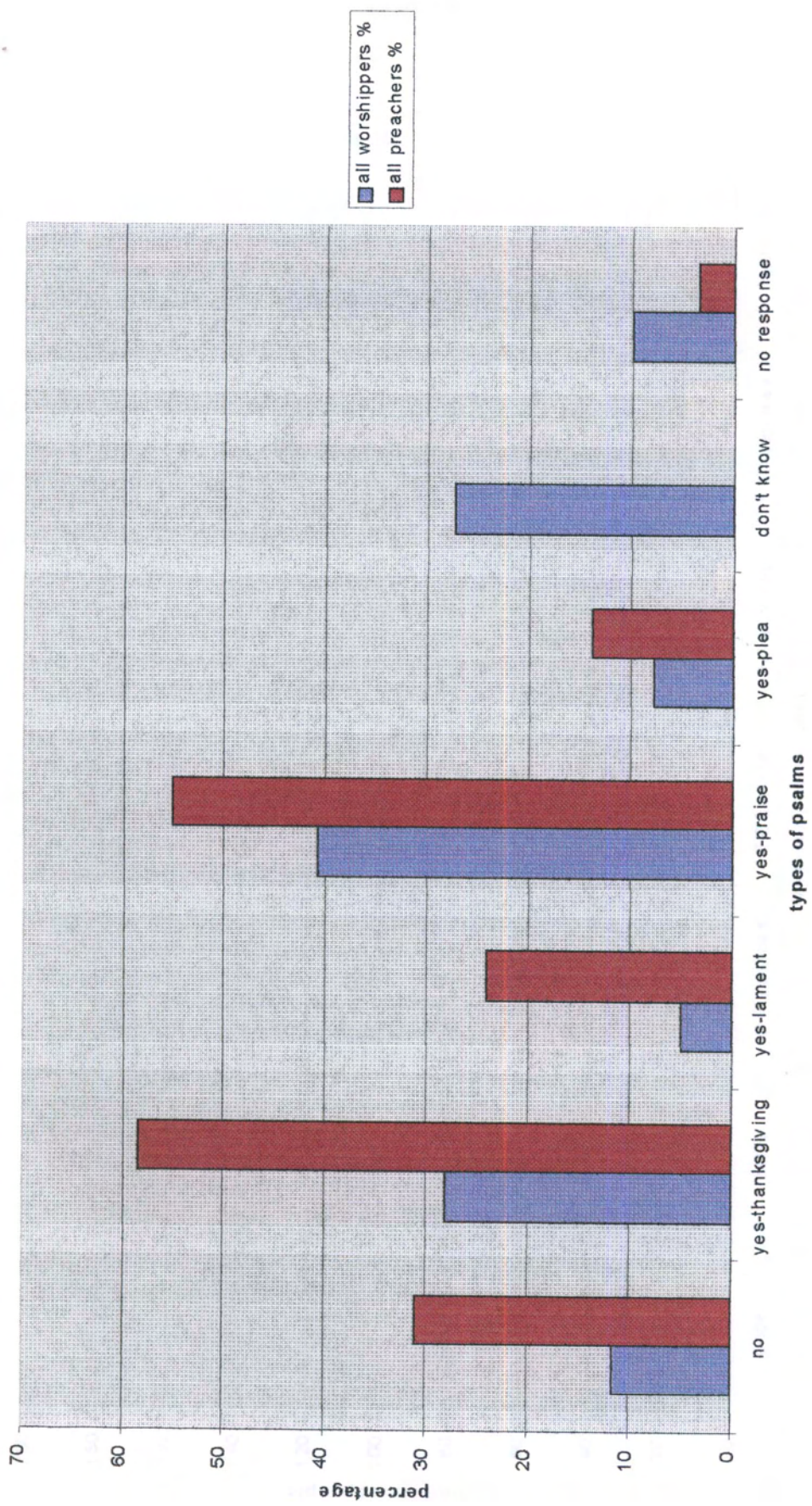
Q4 - singing Psalms as hymns



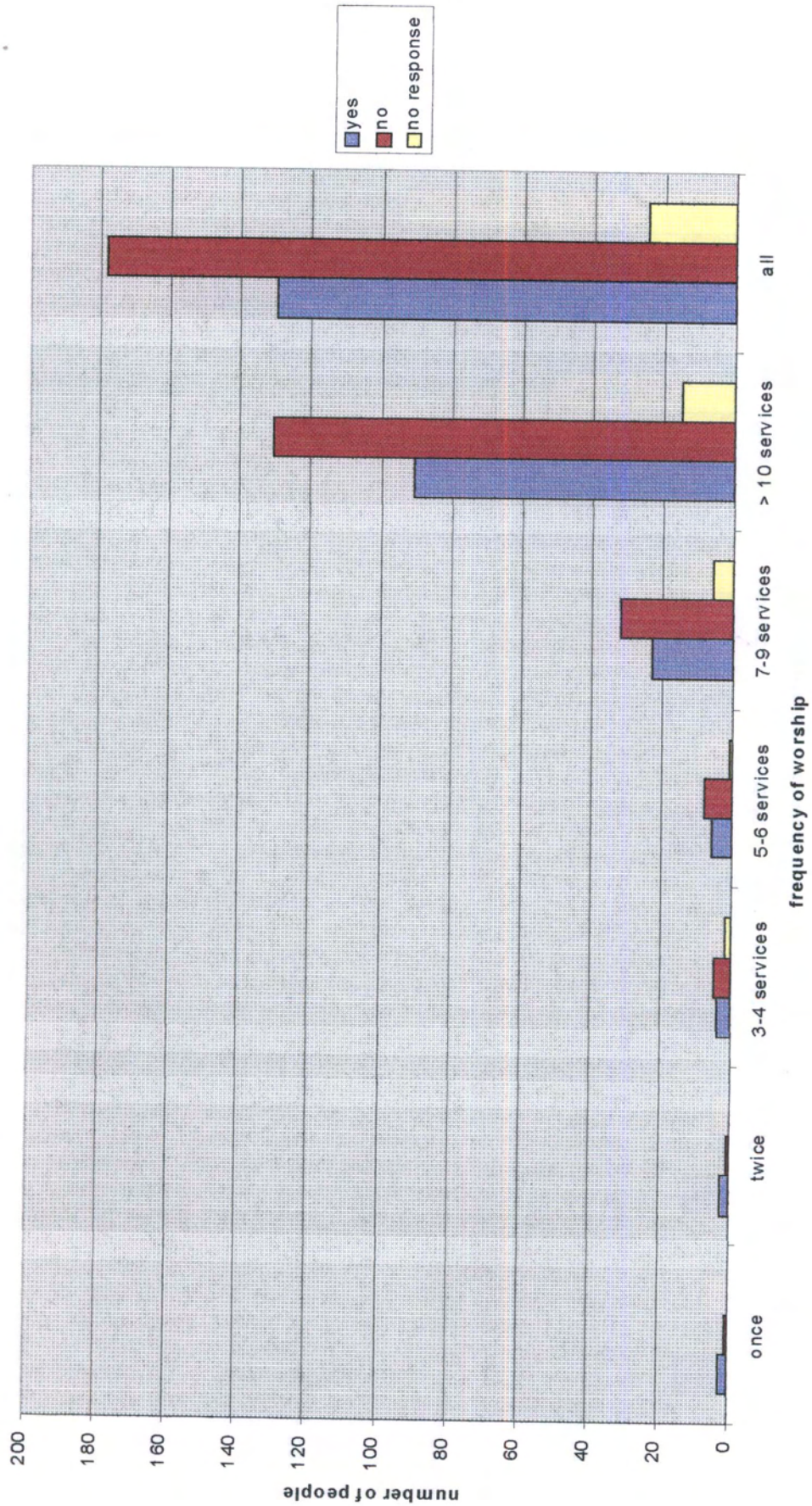
Q5 - When psalms are used in worship, is a particular type of psalm used ?



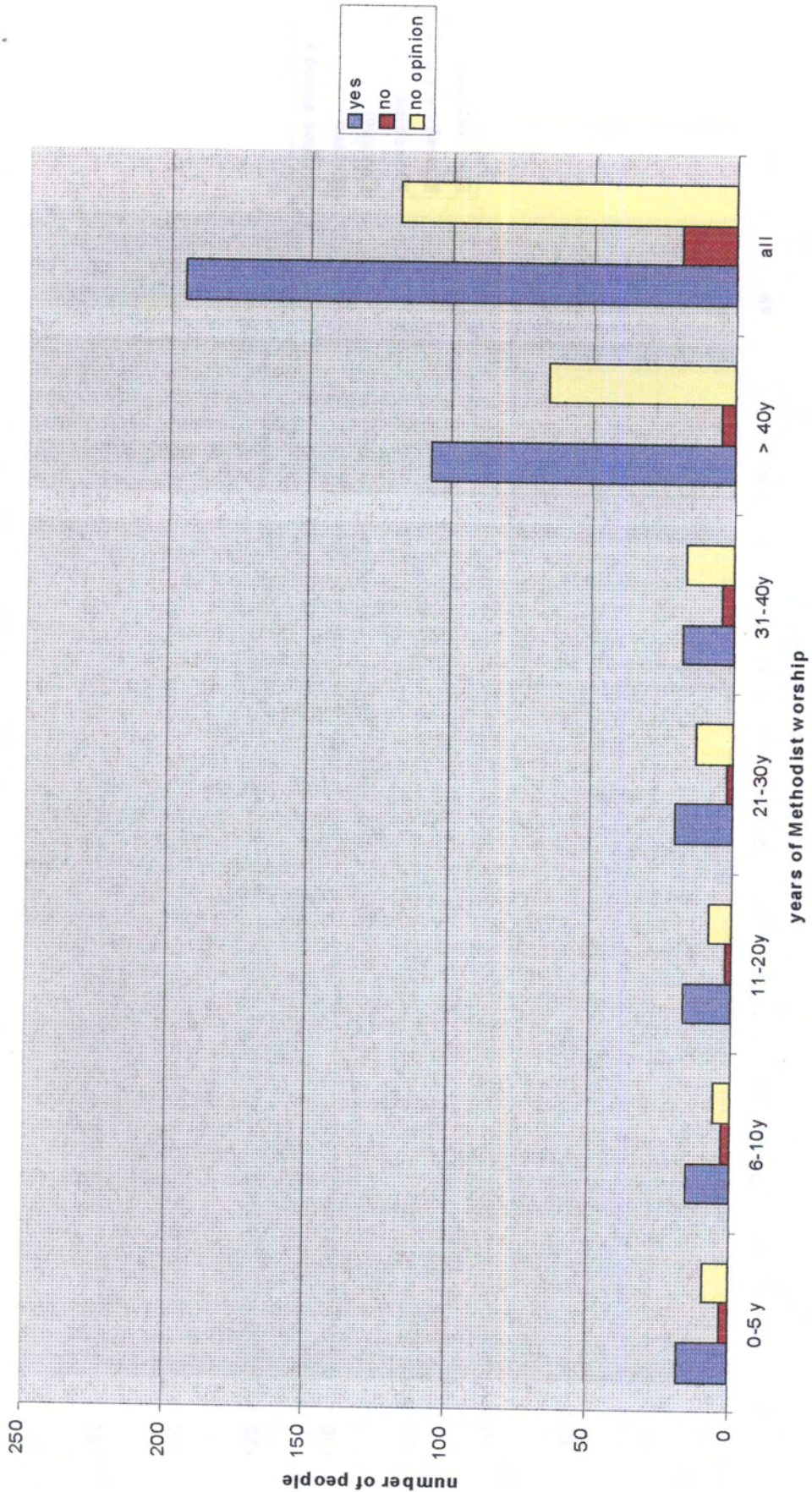
Types of Psalms used - percentage of all worshippers and all preachers



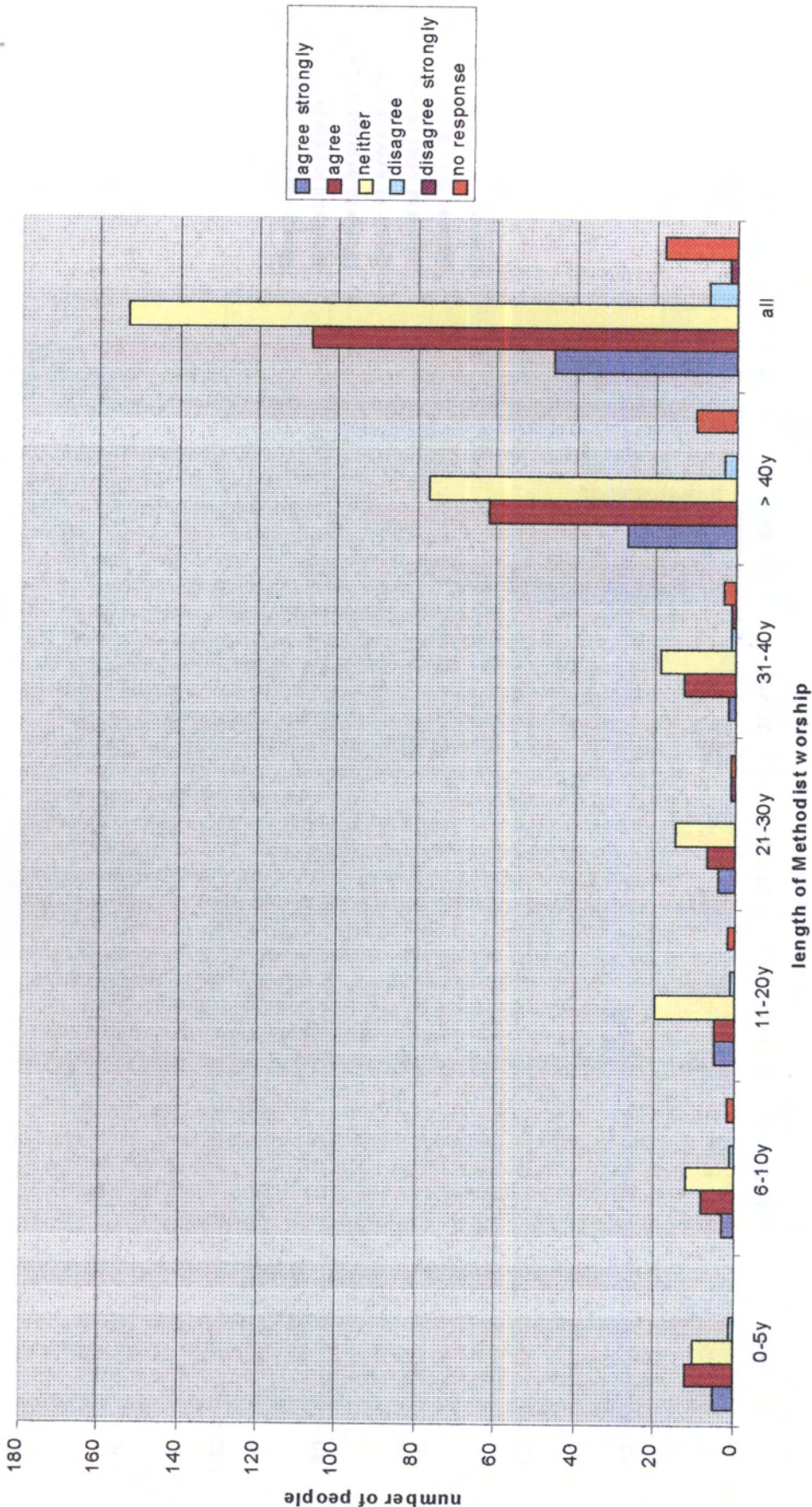
Q6 - do you often hear same psalm in worship?



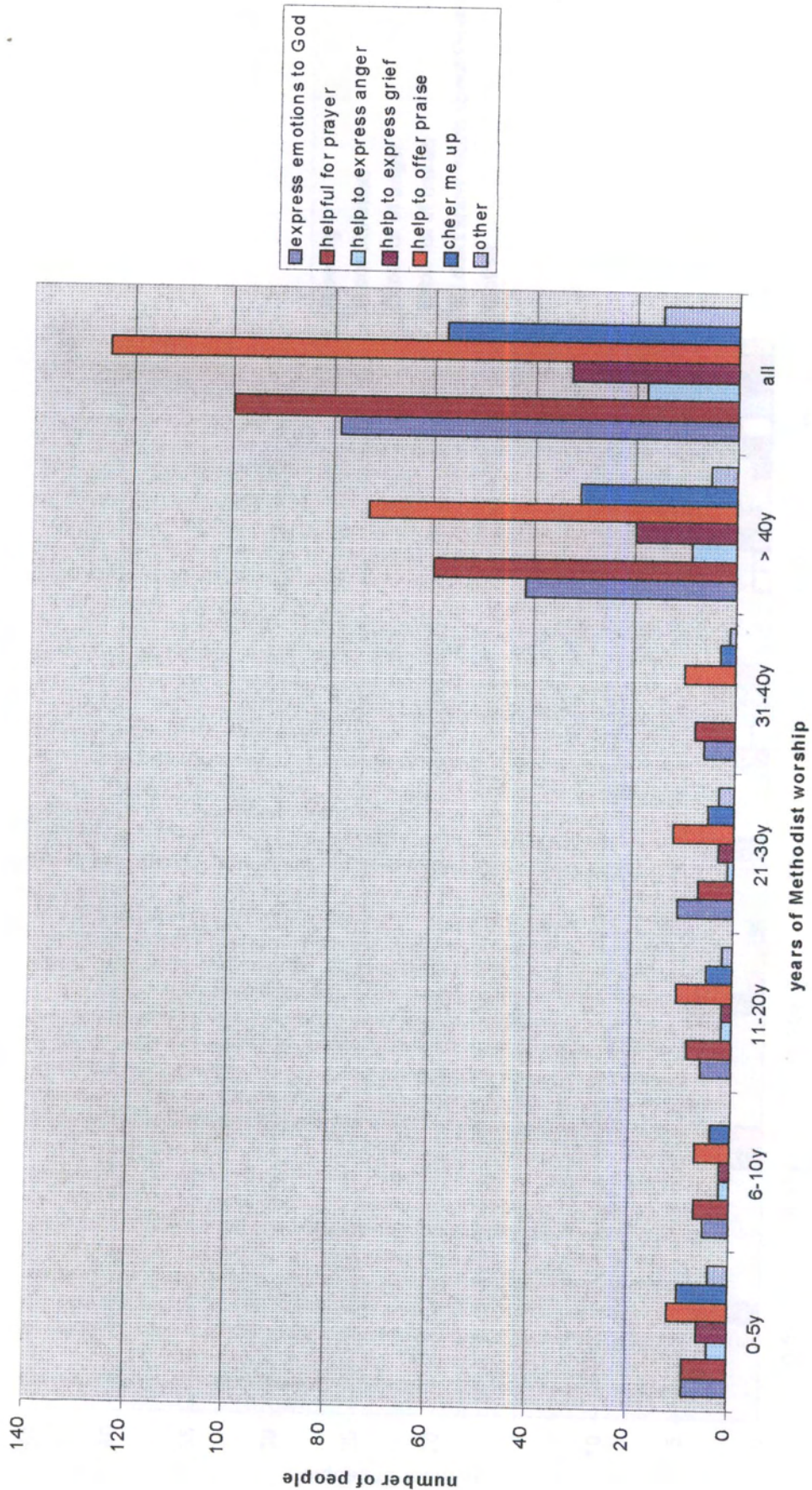
Q7-do you like there to be a Psalm in Sunday worship?



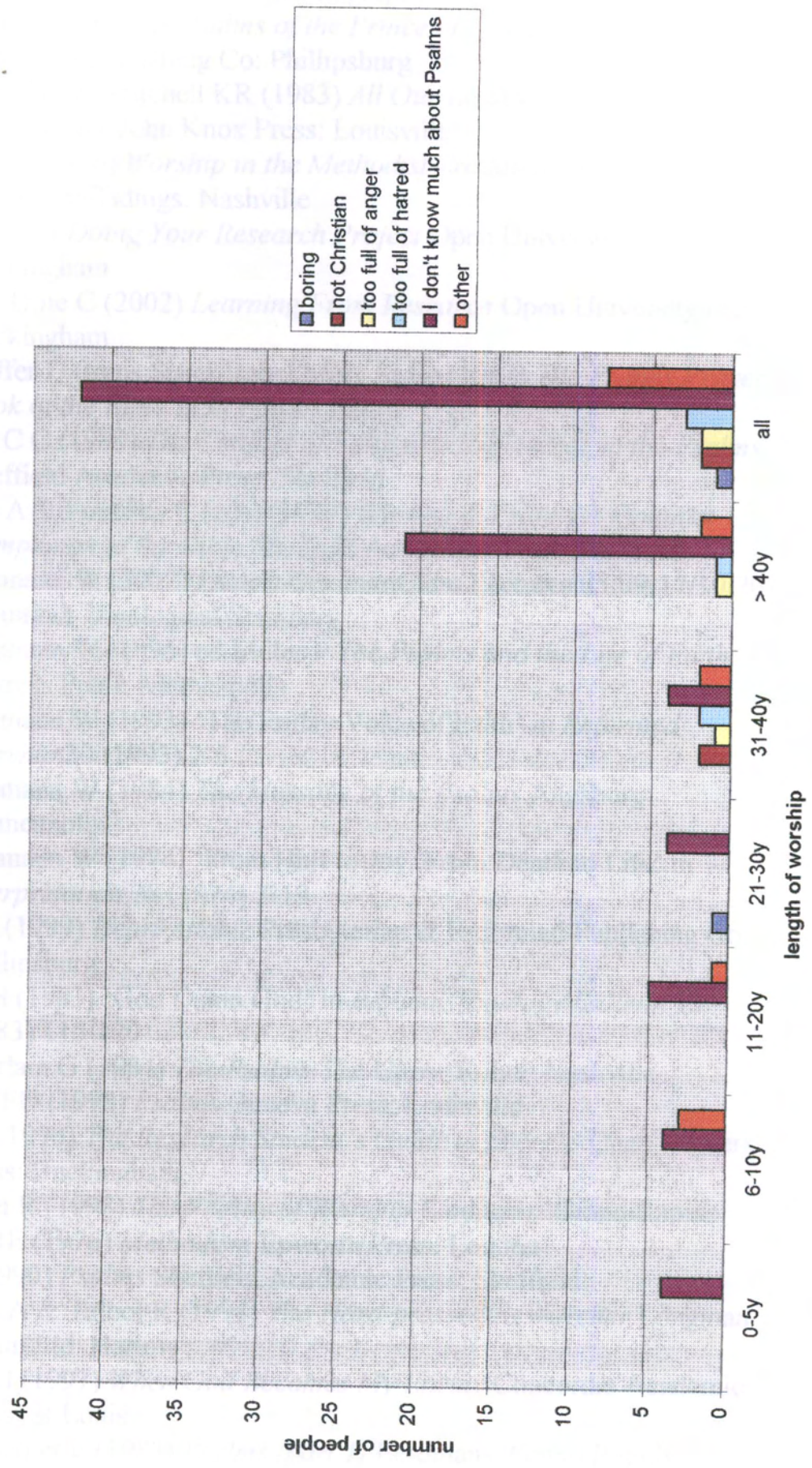
Q8 - 'As an individual, the Psalms are very important to me'



Q9 - positive opinions about the Psalms



Q10 - negative emotions about the Psalms



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